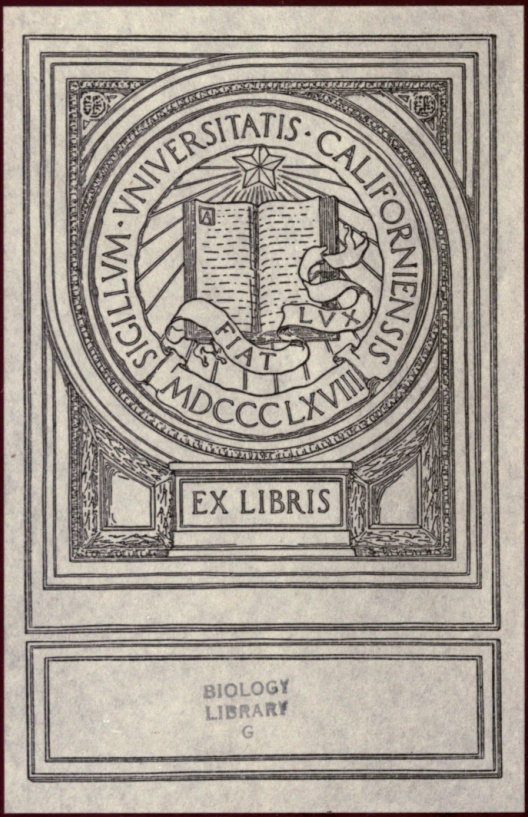

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THE BIRDS OF IONA AND MULL

1852—70

BY THE LATE

HENRY DAVENPORT GRAHAM

AUTHOR OF "THE ANTIQUITIES OF IONA"

WITH A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR

EDITED BY

J. A. HARVIE-BROWN, F.Z.S.

MEMBER OF THE BRIT. ORNITH. UNION

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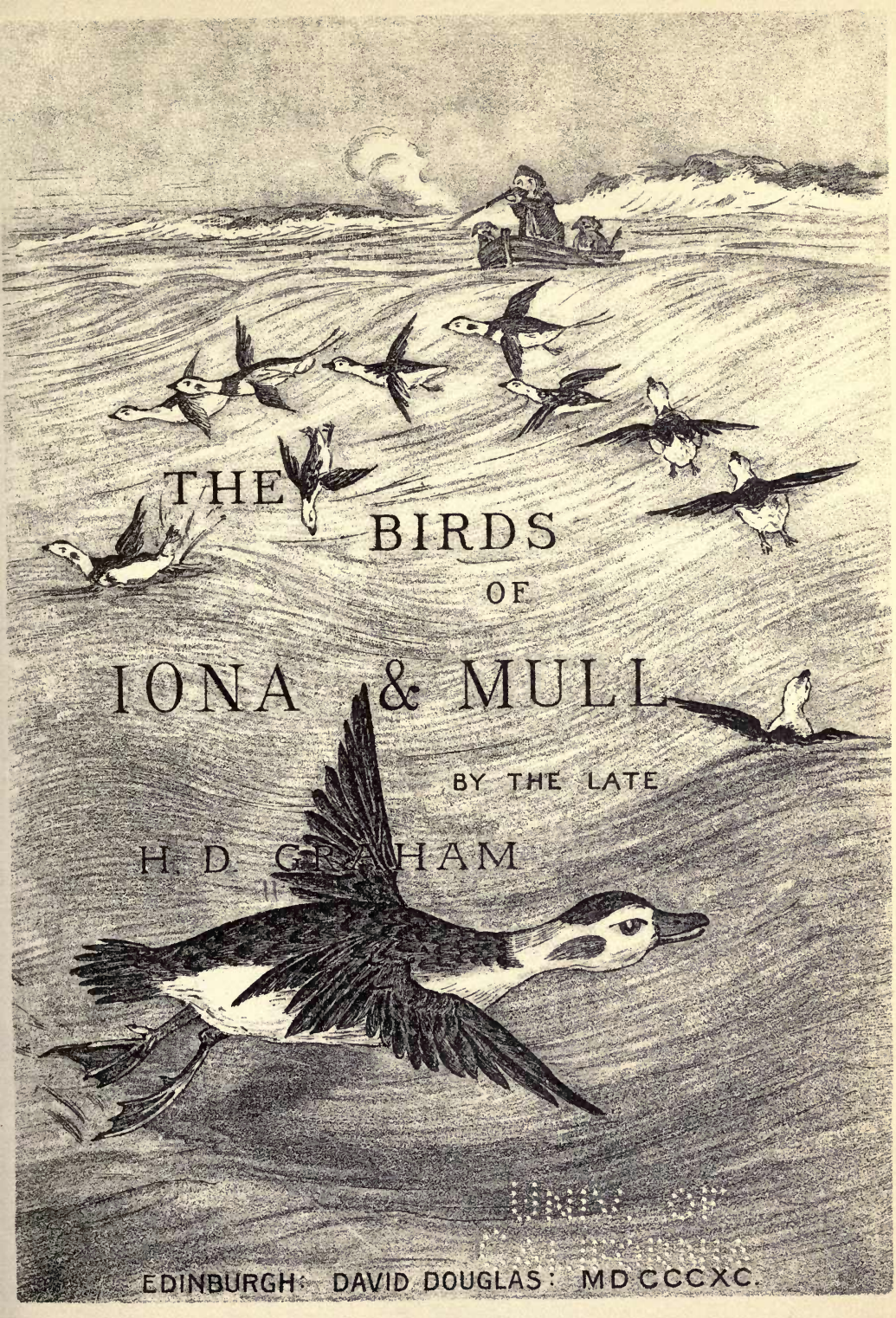

THE BIRDS OF IONA & MULL

BY THE LATE

H. D. GRAHAM

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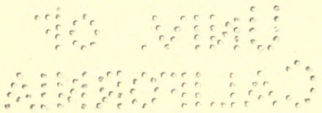

PREFACE.

WHEN it was first proposed that the late Mr H. D. Graham's MSS. should be resuscitated and saved from oblivion, the present Editor had by that time devoted a large share of personal attention to the Natural History of the West of Scotland and the Isles. But as he was aware that Mr H. D. Graham's Notes and Letters were then under able editorship, and had been announced for publication, he considered his time and opportunities would be better bestowed upon other districts which were not receiving so much attention. Although a few occasions did permit of his visiting portions of Mull, and he kept a few notes of such facts as he met with, no special care was given to Mull until it became surely ascertained that the volume on Iona and Mull was not going to appear under the editorship of Mr Robert Gray; nor were any steps taken until after that gentleman's death to again communicate with the family of Mr Graham regarding the Manuscripts and Sketches, of which latter the present Editor retained a vivid recollection, having seen them in Mr Gray's house in Glasgow.

A correspondence ensued with Mr Charles W. Graham, which

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resulted in a request to undertake the editing, and finally all the materials were placed in the present Editor's hands in the beginning of the year 1889. It was also arranged that, as considerable attention had for some years been bestowed upon many other districts of Argyll and the Isles, this volume should form one of the series on the *Vertebrate Fauna of Scotland* at present being issued by Mr David Douglas. This was unanimously approved of by all parties concerned.

As for those who have not yet, of course, been consulted—viz., the readers of the volume—the present Editor desires that it should be looked upon somewhat in the light of a relief-volume, affording insight into the life in the Hebrides not only of the birds of Iona, but also of the Naturalist who spent so much of his time and leisure in their pursuit and study. The sketches—"Heart-pictures"—by the author have been selected for illustration, not as highly-finished artistic productions, but simply as partly illustrating the text, partly illustrating Graham's sense of humour, whilst rapidly drawing them in the long winter evenings for the amusement of the kind friends with whom he lived, and also to serve the purpose of a pleasant recollection of his life and work in Iona amongst his friends and the remaining members of his family.

After careful consideration he has decided not to bring the bird-list up to date, but rather to retain Mr Graham's Notes almost intact; all the more so, as a later opportunity, under the title of another volume of the series, will, it is hoped, be given,

which will at the same time afford the means of bringing up to date the fauna of a much larger and natural area.

He cannot take leave of his portion of the duties connected with the publication without acknowledging to the full the advantage he possessed in the previous partial editing of the late Mr Robert Gray; and also his thanks are due to Mr Charles W. Graham for the excellent condition and chronological order in which the materials had been lovingly preserved, rendering the Editor's work all the more a labour of love and a sincere pleasure. Nor can he omit to record his thanks to Mr William Douglas for the careful attention and excellent assistance he rendered in connection with the illustrative portions, as well as for his supervision of the whole book during its passage through the press.

Lastly, the Editor's thanks are also due to Mr Colin M'Vean, the early friend and companion of Graham, for his ever ready and kindly interest and assistance, his contribution towards the Memoir, and criticism in detail of the sketches, many, if not all, of the incidents themselves remaining green in his memory.

DUNIPACE HOUSE, LARBERT,
8th Sept. 1890.

THE BIRDS of IONA

All shot upon that Sacred Island or in its vicinity.

ORIGINAL PREFACE BY MR ROBERT GRAY.

THE following pages contain the substance of numerous communications addressed to me by the late Henry Davenport Graham, Esq. These were commenced in 1851, and were continued during an interval of twenty years. Shortly before his death he agreed, at my suggestion, to their publication, as a memorial of many pleasant years spent in Iona, and as a contribution to the ornithology of Scotland, to be dedicated chiefly to those who, like himself, preferred seeking their information in the open fields. Mr Graham was, in the strictest sense, a field naturalist, as his glowing descriptions of his favourites and their interesting haunts abundantly prove. No one, indeed, who has studied the habits of birds can fail to appreciate what he has written. The Notes contain so much descriptive power and genuine admiration of Nature in all her varied aspects that it is impossible not to feel that their author was a naturalist of rare abilities.

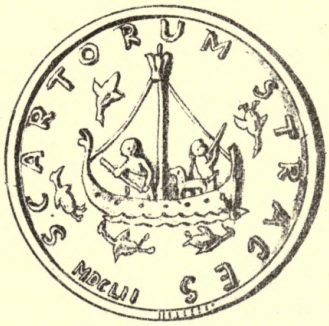
Through the kindness of Mrs Graham, I have been permitted to examine the collection of drawings executed by her husband during his residence in Iona. The bird portraits—about one hundred and seventy in number, and all painted from life—are extremely characteristic, and were at one time, we believe, intended for publication. These are bound together in a volume, entitled, *The Birds of Iona: All Shot upon that Sacred Island or in its Vicinity;* and each drawing is supplied with manuscript notes on the habits of the birds and the localities they frequent, some of which I have made use of in these pages. In a separate volume, containing upwards of two hundred and fifty coloured sketches of sporting recollections, extending over a period of four years, Mr Graham has left a most vivid pictorial history of his

life in Iona. I have pondered over this "book of sports" with an intense although a melancholy interest, many of the drawings being illustrative of incidents narrated in his letters, from which the present volume has been compiled. In one of the scenes is depicted a life-like flock of thirteen long-tailed ducks, and the author in his shooting punt with his two dogs, "Dash" and "Doran," looking eagerly at the result of a poking shot at the retreating birds; in another, a vast colony of Puffins at Lunga Island; in a third, a Cormorant *battue* at Staffa; and in a fourth, a Peregrine Falcon exultingly clutching a Chough, while he himself is being shot at from below.

R. G.

EDINBURGH, 1875.

Our deceased friend, the previous Editor, Mr Robert Gray, in winding up the above preface, goes on to say that in prosecuting his task he ever kept in view the difficulty, he might almost say impossibility, of adding to the journals of so gifted a writer a word that would enhance their originality or freshness.



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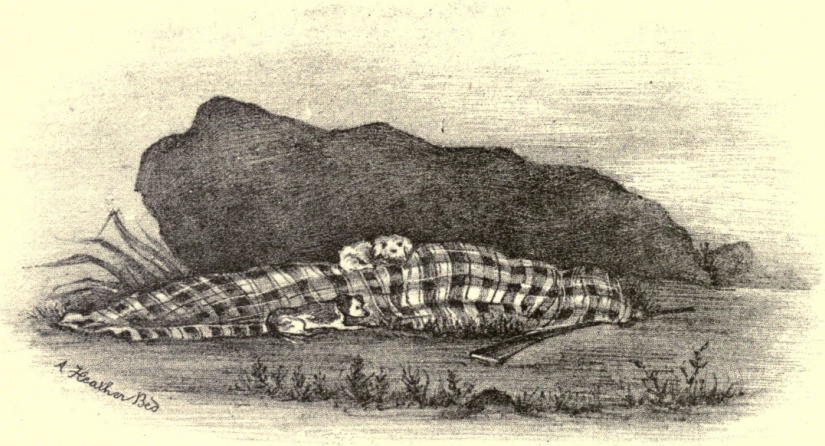
A Heather Bed

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My own doggie
Dorian

MEMOIR.

"Every one knows with what interest it is natural to retrace the course of our own lives. The past state of a man's being is retained in a connection with the present by that principle of self-love which is unwilling to relinquish its hold on what has once been his.

"Though he cannot but be sensible of how little consequence his life can have been in the creation, compared with many other trains of events, yet to himself he has felt it more important than all other trains together."

FOSTER (*First Essay*).

September 1850.

THE storm is roaring in blasts down the chimney, the doors creak, the windows rattle, and the rain in impetuous gusts is driven against the panes. A winter storm is raging among the Hebrides, and howls and dashes round the island of Iona.

Things being thus uninviting out of doors, indoor occupation must be looked for. My gun, well oiled, lies idle in the corner, with the 'Scarbh's' flag dangling from its nail above it. Doran has been out several times to survey the state of the weather, and has at last returned resignedly to dry his shaggy hide at the blazing peats, and I compose myself to start a new diary. But this diary, before commencing it from the present date, I intend prefacing with a few notes of the principal events as far back as I can remember that have occurred to me during my life.

Foster's first essay is on "A man's writing a memoir of himself," which is recommended by that clever writer as a useful

and interesting practice, and the sentences on the preceding page are copied from him as the best introduction and apology to my diary.

Born August 13, 1825. Baptised in the following September.

My father was residing at this time in Upper Gower Street, and was in business at Lincoln's Inn.

Before I began to recollect anything, we left London, my father retiring from active business; and in the year 1830 he went abroad with his whole family. My earliest recollections are of the yellow travelling carriage in which we performed the tour—my mother and myself, Charles and his nurse in the inside, my father and Reginald on the box, and Emma (now Mrs P.) on the dickey behind. The well-loaded carriage was dragged along by four horses, mounted by a pair of French postilions in jack-boots. A few miles in advance we were preceded by Victor, the courier, a big, good-natured Frenchman, in moustache and a sort of uniform. Thus we traversed France, crossed the Alps, and advanced into Italy till we reached Naples. Mount Vesuvius was in a state of eruption, and I recollect watching its flames at night; but little else made any impression upon my mind.

While staying in Rome (1831) we witnessed the election of a new Pope. At night St Peter's was magnificently illuminated; the carnival next came on; but at this time there were great political disturbances, a revolution was apprehended, and the safety of all foreigners, particularly that of the English, was endangered. The hotels containing strangers were barricaded and fortified to resist any attack made by the mob. At length we made our escape, and left the Eternal City precipitately.

When passing through Florence we were seized with the measles. An order had been issued forbidding any foreigners remaining more than a single night in the city; however, on my father's representing his case to the authorities, we obtained leave to rest three days.

I recollect looking out at the carriage window at Mont Blanc as we passed within sight of its glaciers. I also retain a vivid recollection of Switzerland and the tedious zig-zag roads across the Alps. We narrowly escaped destruction here. The ropes which attached the carriage to a team of oxen broke, the carriage rolled backwards down the declivity, ran to the side of the road, which was bounded by a precipice, and came in contact with a small tree growing by the roadside, which stopped its career. My father and Reginald had dismounted, and were walking up the hill at the time, and Emma, to save herself, jumped down from her elevated seat behind on to the road and escaped injury.

An agreeable sojourn of some continuance we spent on the banks of the Lake of Geneva, at Ouchy, near the town of Lausanne, where we hired a house situated among vineyards and chestnut-trees. We also resided for some time in Paris at a hotel in the Place Vendôme.

On returning home from the Continent we brought a Parisian tutor, Mr B., who, though of English parentage, had been brought up in France, and was indeed quite a model of a Frenchman, volatile and thoughtless, with a truly Parisian vanity and love of *showing off*. However, we became much attached to him for his amiable manners, and because he was

our companion as well as tutor. We resided chiefly at Rose Cottage, E.B., and he used to lead us forth on long rambles upon the South Downs, armed with leaping-poles, and in quest of adventures, or under the chalk cliffs of Beachy Head, where he led us up desperate attempts at escalading the crumbling heights; but his belief was that any hazard was trifling, provided one created admiration, more especially in female spectators. We spent one winter in the Crescent, Clapham, also some time in Brighton. Mr B. left us after two years, and returned to France.

Mr B.'s successor in the dominie's chair was Mr T., a native of Greenock, and a student for the Scotch Church. He was a very great contrast to our last preceptor, for as Mr B. was a thorough Frenchman, so, on the other hand, Mr T. was as demure, as quiet, and retiring as a native of Scotland need be. Besides being an excellent instructor, he was a man of steady religious principles, which he was careful to instil into the minds of his pupils.

During this time we resided half the year at Rose Lodge, Clapham Common, within ball-shot of the Hall, where my father's mother lived. Of course, we spent a great deal of our time there. She was a very superior and clever woman, an excellent artist, and exceedingly *particular*. Indeed, she was the authoress of *Teresa Tidy's Eighteen Maxims on Neatness and Order*. As her publisher observed of her, "Mrs G. was a lady who made herself beloved and feared." The other half of the year we spent at Rose Cottage. Eastbourne was then a lovely, retired spot. On one side the beautiful undulating South Downs extended like a huge sea wave. Upon them one may walk without ever feeling

fatigue, so elastic is the short green turf, so sweet the yellow blossoming furze, and so exhilarating the pure sea breeze. The sea continually rolled upon the beach at the foot of the long range of white chalk cliffs forming the stupendous heights of Beachy Head, and which give Albion her name. About nine miles west is Windmill, the property of my grandfather, Mr C., whom I but lightly remember; but we children used frequently to visit there while Mrs C. was still living. The mansion-house is closely surrounded by wood, the lofty trees being inhabited by a rookery and heronry. What deeply impressed our childish minds was the mysterious quietness which reigned through the apartments indoors, contrasted with the noise of the rookery out of doors; the damp, musty smell which prevailed everywhere, in consequence of being so much shut in by wood; the excessively high feeding, which caused a visit to Windmill always to terminate with a dose of salts; and the ten-shilling tip we received at our departure.

1834.—I have a regular diary for this and the two succeeding years, a singular sort of production; but we were early taught to keep journals—an admirable habit!

October 4.—My sister Caroline born.

1835.—In September the entire family went to Edmond Castle on a visit to our uncle. Mr T. left us, very much to our regret. He went afterwards to Kelso, but after that we never heard anything more of him.

1836.—This winter we spent in Paris, living in the Rue de la Paix. We renewed our acquaintance with Mr B., whom we found in Paris giving lessons in French and English. He

accordingly came daily to teach Charles and me French. This was a very happy, agreeable winter, and, besides the enjoyment, we received the benefit of the instructions of a whole mob of French masters. Mons. F. taught elocution; Mons. S. dancing, Mons. N. drawing, Mons. R. music, Mr B. French; and lastly, we went to the barracks of the pompiers (firemen) to be exercised by a sergeant in gymnastics. Returned home to England in May. This time we also brought a tutor with us, Mr K., a German; but though he got us on very well with German and French, yet his temper was so disagreeable that we had to part with him in the autumn. He was a native of Saxony, banished from thence for writing against the Government. This winter, instead of living at Rose Cottage, which was getting too small for us, we went into Susan's.

1837.—Having now no tutor in the house, Reginald went to the Rev. Mr T.'s, who lived on the other side of Clapham Common, with about a dozen pupils. Charles and I received daily lessons from Mr R. (nicknamed M'Diarmid), who taught us writing, English, geography, and the globes, chemistry, geometry, &c., &c.

1838.—Charles and I now went to school at the Rev. Mr G.'s, Clapham, where there were about twenty other boys besides ourselves. Of course we disliked it exceedingly, it being the first time of our leaving home. When the summer holidays came on, we went down to Susan's, Eastbourne. After this, instead of returning to Mr G.'s, I was sent to Dr B.'s, Coombe Wood, near Kingston-upon-Thames. It was a much larger school, containing sixty boys, and it was conducted on the

Pestalozzi system. There were seven under-masters, and each class never remained more than an hour at the same task. At this time I had a strong inclination to go to sea, which originated from perusing Captain Basil Hall's *Fragments*, from dislike to school, and from a kind of taste for enterprise. An extraordinary freak entered into my head to perform. One fine afternoon I jumped over the playground palings and set off, without knowing whither or wherefore. After walking till midnight in the direction of Dorking, I crept into the window of a barn, and slept on a ladder. At sunrise I resumed my journey, breakfasted for a shilling at a roadside inn (the sign of Tangiers), and walked in the direction of London, taking a considerable circuit to avoid the neighbourhood of Kingston. It was a lovely day; the sun shone bright, and I enjoyed it as an escaped convict or a truant schoolboy can alone do. However, after walking till four in the afternoon, I arrived at Westminster Bridge, hungry, weary, and quite unresolved what next to do. While I was sitting in one of the alcoves on Westminster Bridge (where I thought that, if it came to the worst, I might pass the night), an old man with a bundle turned in and seated himself on the stone bench. He had the appearance of great poverty, though his dress, patched and threadbare as it was, showed attempts at neatness and shabby gentility; but there was something exceedingly mild and benevolent in his thin, starved physiognomy, so that after a few commonplace remarks I told him that I was a boy just come up from the country in search of a place, and asked him if he could recommend me where to go. Now, this poor old man was a real good Samaritan, as I will presently show, and it reminds me of

the passage, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares;" for while this old man thought he was sheltering a poor, friendless boy, who could never make him any return, yet by it he eventually made friends who saved him from starvation, and enabled him to end his days in comfort. We jogged on together till he brought me to the Cheshire Cheese, a small public in St Clement Danes, where he had a garret, and, like the Irish bard who burnt his harp to cook his guest's supper, so my poor host pawned some of the last articles of his furniture (including his poker, which fetched a halfpenny) to procure a supper. Next day was Sunday, and being very tired, I remained at home with my friend, old S. He was a singular old man; he had seen better days, and had manners worthy of a gentleman, but now, alas! he was struggling to support existence as a journeyman tailor. He was very loquacious, and, being an astrologer, he cast my horoscope and told me my fortune. He was a bit of an antiquary also, and said that this narrow lane, St Clement Danes, was so called from the Danes, when they invaded England, landed from the Thames, and entered London through this street. On Monday my adventures were brought to an abrupt termination, for, proceeding to Tower Hill and inquiring at the Naval Rendezvous, with a swagger, for a billet on board a man-of-war, the landlord, who had been put on the look-out by my friends, immediately pinned me, and carried me back in triumph in his gig to Coombe Wood. As I afterwards learned, old S. was very unhappy at my not returning. Some days after my father saw him. He had not even ventured to examine a small bundle which I had tied

up in a handkerchief, which, by-the-bye, contained a bible, a map of England, a telescope, and a pocket compass! Worthy old S. lived about five years after this, and proved himself a most worthy object of charity. I remained at Coombe Wood till the Christmas holidays, when I returned to Rose Lodge, and this was the only year that I ever was at school.

1839, *January* 17.—I was appointed as volunteer first class (now called Naval Cadets) to the 'Zebra,' a brig of 16 guns, fitting out at Sheerness. A few days after I was swaggering about in my uniform and dirk, and went down to join my ship. Captain P. of the 'Howe' enrolled me in the service, and taking me by the arm and giving me a shake, said, "Ah, there's some beef in this boy!" This was meant as a compliment. I was then examined by the schoolmaster to see if I was qualified to enter. The questions were to write from dictation, "I have joined H.M.S. 'Zebra,'" and this rule of three, "If one bushel costs 10s., what will ten bushels?"

In February we sailed for the Mediterranean. I was appointed mid of the fore-top and of the jolly-boat. The first time I went aloft the captain hailed me to go through the "lubber's hole;" however, I succeeded in surmounting the difficulties of getting over the futtock shrouds, and at the end of my watch, when I went below, the captain's steward came with a pound of gingerbread "for going aloft so well." While the 'Zebra' was fitting we were hulked on board the 'Shannon,' the remains of the ship which was so celebrated in the American War under Captain Broke. She was a very little frigate. Captain Broke was one of the first to improve the practice of naval gunnery,

and it was this probably that enabled him to beat the 'Chesapeake.'

Broke must have been previously known as a brave man, for a fo'castle ditty made at the beginning of the war contained these lines,

> "And as the war they did provoke,
> We'll pay them with our cannon;
> And the first to do it shall be Broke,
> In the gallant ship the 'Shannon.'"

After touching at Gibraltar, we proceeded for Malta, encountering a tremendous gale off Cape Bon. We were scudding under close-reefed maintopsail and foresail, and shipped a tremendous sea. The brig, being an old-fashioned, deep-waisted vessel, retained a great body of water within her bulwarks; for a few seconds she remained as if stunned by the blow, her lee gunwale completely below water, and her yardarms touching the sea. It was a very critical moment; but gradually the water escaped, she rose, and again began to labour among the waves. "All hands shorten sail!" We passed some ships under bare poles. At last we reached Malta, and anchored in Valetta Harbour, and went into Dockyard Creek. We found all the squadron here, with Admiral S. in the 'Princess Charlotte,' 104. The other ships composing the Mediterranean Squadron were the 'Asia,' 84; 'Bellerophon,' 78; 'Belleisle,' 72; 'Benbow,' 72; 'Ganges,' 84; 'Hastings,' 72; 'Implacable,' 74; 'Minden,' 72; 'Pembroke,' 72; 'Powerful,' 84; 'Carysfort,' 26; 'Castor,' 36; 'Daphne,' 18; 'Dido,' 18; 'Wasp,' 18; 'Hazard,' 18; 'Jaseur,' 16; 'Rodney,' 92; 'Talavera,' 72; 'Vanguard,' 80.

Steamers—'Hydra,' 'Gorgon,' 'Vesuvius,' 'Stromboli,' 'Acheron,' 'Blazer,' &c.

My shipmates in the 'Zebra' were particularly kind, gentlemanly, and agreeable. M'K. was my particular friend; he was the beau-ideal of a naval officer, very handsome, exceedingly lively, with a continual flow of the highest spirits, and a most excellent seaman. He was a native of Ayrshire; his father was a colonel, his mother a French nun, whom the colonel rescued from some Spanish town during the Peninsular War, and married her. He inherited the good qualities of the Briton with the vivacity of the Frenchwoman.

Cruising about all the summer and autumn, sometimes with the fleet and sometimes alone, we visited Sicily, Catania, and Palermo, the Greek islands, Paros, Smyrna, the Plains of Troy, Alexandria, &c.

In November I exchanged into the 'Bellerophon,' liner, 78 guns. Changing from the little brig of 16 guns, the 'Bellerophon' (or *Billy rough 'un*, as she was commonly called) of 78 guns was a new world to me. Such a number of messmates, such superior accommodation and comfort, and so little duty to do! It is a great advantage to begin with a small vessel, as one then becomes accustomed at once to the roughs of the service, and a youngster learns much more in less time. In the 'Zebra' I was made a *top* and *boat* midshipman at once; in a big ship I should have had nothing to do for the two first years. In the 'Zebra' I was mate of the watch and kept the log;[1] in the 'Bellerophon' I was about the sixth or seventh officer in a watch, though we were in four watches instead of three. The captain was an old easy-going man.

[1] The log was a large black board four feet long, folding on hinges like a book, ruled with white paint lines, and was marked with a lump of chalk.—Note by C. W. Graham.

1840.—The 'Bellerophon' had a fine smart ship's company, but she was in a wretched state of discipline. On Christmas Day, as we were lying at anchor with the rest of the squadron at Vourla, the whole ship's company were drunk, and the noise of the revelry was so great that the admiral, though lying half a mile off and more, made a signal for the 'Bellerophon' "to make *less noise*," as it disturbed the whole fleet.

In May we were sent to Naples. Our Government had some dispute with the king relating to the sulphur trade, and we ran into the Bay of Naples, with our guns loaded and double-shotted, threatening to bombard the town. This not taking effect, we went out again, and blockaded the port. We had the assistance of the 'Hydra' steamer, and we captured a great number of Neapolitan ships and sent them as prizes to Malta. One day, while we were on this service, we spied a little brig, hull down, on the horizon. We immediately gave chase. As soon as the brig saw that she was chased she altered course and made all sail to escape. She sailed very well, and we observed that she was also much better handled than the other Italian traders that we had previously taken. It was a whole forenoon before we came within range of her, and then we fired a shot across her bows. The only effect it had was to make her run up her white Neapolitan ensign as if in defiance. The chase still continued, and we repeatedly fired at and over her, till at length, as we rapidly closed with her, she reluctantly shortened sail and hove to. At this time our ship was bowling along under an immense cloud of canvas, and we swooped down upon the little brig like a gigantic eagle upon a partridge. We were cracking on stu'nsails alow and

aloft. In a moment the hands were turned up. "Shorten sail!" "Every man at his station." "Trip up the lower stu'n-sails!" "Lower away!" "Rig in your booms!" And the vast expanse of stu'nsails were rapidly folded in, the ship's speed gradually decreased, till at length, with the maintopsail laid aback, she remains stationary, though pitching and tossing over the waves like an impatient courser curvetting and plunging when he is reined in by his rider. In the meanwhile, though, where's the brig? We had shot nearly a mile beyond her, and in the bustle of the moment no one had been watching her motions. She had turned her head inshore, and was crowding all sail to get within the range of the land batteries' guns. However, we were not long in following her, and a good shot from the bow-guns tore off one half of her maintop-gallant mast, and she was again reduced to surrender herself. We were surprised on nearing her to see the crew all dressed in blue and white in the man-of-war fashion, as well as their smartness aloft, and we soon discovered that the brig had already been taken by the 'Hydra,' and the mid who had been put in charge of her had been leading us this long wild-goose chase for his own private amusement. Our captain, of course, was very angry, but he let him go with a slight reprimand. I believe he got off so well from the captain's admiration of his adroitness.

At last the sulphur question was settled, and we went into Naples Bay, where we remained at anchor for about a month. Our ship was continually crowded with visitors, and regattas, balls, and parties, on board and ashore, succeeded one another in rapid succession.

Visited Pompeii, Herculaneum, and went to the bottom of the crater of Mount Vesuvius. We also took the ship round to Bahia Bay, a very pretty place, with a great number of temples. Thence we went to Malta, passing through the Straits of Messina. Becalmed for a night off Mount Stromboli, which was flaming and bellowing loudly. Visited Rhodes and Alexandria, where I saw old Mehemet Ali, a white-haired old patriarch, mounted on a mule, riding through the streets of his capital with little ceremony.

In September the British fleet commenced active operations in aid of the Sultan against his rebellious vassal Mehemet Ali. That very clever man, having raised the character and efficiency of the Egyptian troops by introducing European discipline and the assistance of European officers, was much more than a match for the Turkish army. The Egyptians, under the command of Ibrahim Pacha (son of Mehemet Ali), a very brave soldier, had driven the Turks completely out of Palestine, and no doubt that if it had not been for foreign interference they would have forced their way to the walls of Constantinople, and there have enforced the demands of Mehemet Ali.

The greater part of the Turkish fleet had deserted and gone to Alexandria to join the pacha. Our naval instructor met some of the native officers on board this fleet who had been at Portsmouth under his instruction. The remainder of the Turkish fleet was under the command of Admiral Walker, a captain in the British navy. The Egyptian ships, though well manned and equipped, never ventured out of the port of Alexandria.

Operations commenced at the ancient town of Beyrout.

Upon the 11th of September the fleet anchored there, consisting of several line-of-battle ships, besides smaller vessels and two Austrian corvettes. At about 1 P.M. they opened fire upon the town. Broadsides were poured without ceasing into its walls until long after dark. A small vessel was coming into the harbour at the time, and her officers described the scene as being very grand. The silvery light of the moon, sleeping upon the white minarets and mosques of the devoted town, contrasted with the red lurid flashes of fire issuing from the black hulls; above hung a dark, black pall of sulphurous smoke, which was occasionally cleft by the meteor-like rockets thrown up by the Austrians. The town made little or no return to our fire. The troops retired for safety into cellars and bomb-proof buildings. In the morning we found the town in ruins, though the houses escaped being utterly destroyed owing to the softness of the stone, which allowed the shot free passage without being shattered.

As the town did not yet surrender, and it not being thought safe to land in consequence of the great force of the enemy within the town (and from our mastheads we could see a large camp behind the town), so firing was still continued at intervals whenever any movement was seen. There appeared to be a storehouse of some kind which they were very anxious to reach to carry off its contents; to reach it, however, the soldiers had to walk a short distance exposed to our shot, which always stopped any attempt of the kind. At night they had no better fortune, for the moment a light was observed moving in that direction a volley of shot extinguished it. An old Turk, who had apparently charge of this depôt, certainly deserved credit for his perseverance

at his post. The ships having nothing particular to fire at, the guns' crews of the various ships vied with one another in hitting some particular mark to prove their skill in aiming. This door happened to attract notice, and so many shots were directed against it. At last one pierced it, bursting it open at the same time. Upon this the old custodian came, and after looking out as if to see who had knocked, he shut the door and retired. This happened several times, till at last a shot came and knocked the door all to atoms, upon which the porter for the last time presented himself, and finding that his occupation was gone, calmly walked away from the spot. A flagstaff displaying the Egyptian banner was the next mark, and it was soon bowled over, upon which they set up another flag in the interior of the town in such a difficult position that, though every ship felt her honour concerned in knocking it down, yet none could succeed, till the evening put an end to the contest.

At night a wild notion entered the heads of some of the 'Bellerophon's' midshipmen to go on shore in the dark and get the flag. Of course they would be obliged to leave the ship secretly, without the knowledge of the superior officers. Accordingly, without more ado, H. and D'A. swam ashore half naked, each with a sword hung round his neck. They landed on the rocks and crept over a breach made by our guns in the wall of the city, and, finding no one stirring, they cautiously made their way over the ruins until they arrived at the flagstaff, where to their great disappointment they found that the ensign was not flying, and so they had nothing to do but to return without it. Looking down into some courts below, they saw a great number

of soldiers sleeping in the bright moonlight. However, they got safe back to the shore without being seen, and so, plunging into the sea, got back to the ship, where they were hauled up quietly by one or two men let into the secret, and who had ropes let down for them from the head of the ship. What was their surprise to find next morning that the disputed flag was already brought on board the ship! A mate, John D., had been appointed to row guard during the night in an armed boat, and he induced his men to land him quietly under the walls of the town, giving them orders to lay off a short distance from the shore till his return. He in the meantime ascended the breach, threaded his way through the town, reached the flagstaff and hauled it down; wrapping the flag round his waist, he descended to the boat and got safe away with his prize. During the whole adventure he carried a pistol on full cock in each hand, and if he had met any man he intended to have fired at him and hurry back to the boat; so it was fortunate that he did not meet with his two messmates who were engaged in the same mad adventure, or most assuredly they would have killed one another. The flag was, I believe, privately sent to the admiral. However, it was a mere bravado, for it did no good, though I dare say the enemy wondered at finding their ensign gone next morning. However, they soon put up another.

Beyrout was not surrendered for some time after this; but at last a landing party was sent ashore which captured it after a little hand-to-hand work. Two of our marines related that they were pressing very hard upon the governor of the town, who defended himself bravely, and with a stroke of his beautifully-

tempered Damascus scimitar had shorn off one man's bayonet as if it had been but a carrot; the other man transfixed him before he could recover himself to give another blow.

Operations were carried on very briskly in the meantime. The ships were all distributed up and down the coast bombarding the towns, taking forts, and driving the enemy out of every position that they held near the coast. A camp was formed at a place a little north of Beyrout called Djourna Bay, or St George's Bay (being the spot where St George is said to have killed the dragon). This little army consisted of a large body of marines, field-pieces manned by parties of bluejackets, and several regiments of Turks. For some time we were stationed off the Dog River to defend the bridge in case the enemy should attempt to surprise the camp, and we were at the same time distributing a vast number of muskets among the friendly mountaineers, the tribes that inhabited the mountains of Lebanon. The Emir Beshir, the prince of one of these clans, paid us a visit, and while he was being entertained in the captain's cabin, one of his officers amused us in the gun-room by displaying his skill in the use of their admirably-tempered Damascene blades. Drawing two chairs within a few feet of each other, he placed a teacup at the extreme edge of each; he then rested the end of a tolerably thick broomstick across the nearer edge of each cup, then flourishing his sabre over his head for a moment, it descended like lightning, cutting the stick clean in two without in the least displacing the two cups, much less knocking them off the chairs. The scabbards of these scimitars are split or open down the back for half their length, otherwise it could not be drawn in and out

for it is as crooked as the letter C. The blades are beautifully watered, the edge is extremely sharp, and cuts clean through flesh and bone; but the fine temper of the blade makes it brittle, and its shape quite unfits it for thrusting.

A great number of small actions came off in various parts of the coast of Palestine between single ships and the smaller towns. We lost one man, who was shot in a boat expedition. My old ship, the 'Zebra,' distinguished herself at the taking of Scanderoon and other places. Her boats were at Alexandretta, landing under a very sharp fire of musketry for some time. The cutters did not lose a single man, yet they had curious escapes. One man had a ball through his hat, another had a ball through his handkerchief, another through the leg of his trousers; a sergeant of marines had the tip of his musket struck, so that he could not load it again; and, lastly, a marine was struck full in the middle of the chest, fortunately upon the little brass plate which is placed upon his cross-belts at their intersection. He preserved the ball, which was slightly flattened, and was impressed with some of the letters from the motto, "*Per terra, per mare*," which is inscribed in raised letters upon the brass plate.

After the taking of Scanderoon one of the merchants asked the captain to dinner at the remains of his house. The table was spread with sixteen dishes, which at a given signal were uncovered, and displayed sixteen great, round, hard, black thirty-two pound shots! "There, Captain Elliot," said the hostess,—"there are the presents you were so kind as to send ashore to us; these were all picked up in my drawing-room and parlour." However, after she had had her joke, something more digestible

made its appearance. I could mention many curious adventures that occurred during this campaign in the months of September and October, but I will go on at once to the last great blow which decided the whole affair. This was the capture of St Jean d'Acre. This town is situated on a small promontory, so that it has three sea fronts and only one side towards the land. The fortifications rise immediately from the sea and are extremely formidable; indeed, both by land and sea it was reckoned impregnable. Acre was taken by the Crusaders, and there is a hill very near to the town which still bears the name of Richard Cœur de Lion. The ancient name of St Jean d'Acre was Ptolemais; by the Turks it is called Accho. It was successfully defended by Captain Sir Sidney Smith against Napoleon, who, at the head of a victorious army, was checked and beaten by a handful of British seamen and undisciplined Turks, the sole garrison of this mighty fortress. But now it was doomed to fall by the hands of British sailors and Turkish allies.

All the smaller towns having been subdued, the fleet was assembled at Beyrout preparatory to the grand attack meditated on Acre. The squadron was augmented by the presence of two Austrian frigates and a large Turkish line-of-battle ship called the 'Mahoumadier.' She was commanded by Captain W., a pacha in the Sultan's service. The 'Hydra' steamer had been previously sent to sound the depth of water in the neighbourhood of the town, and she laid down some buoys, though a long way out from the town, as she was directed to keep out of shot. The enemy saluted her with a couple of shot; one ranged over her and the other struck her hull, though without hurting her. She

returned one shot from her immense 68-pounder (which entered the very embrasure that had fired) and paddled off. The 'Hydra's' visit was of very great service to us, as it proved, for the enemy, taking it for granted that she had been marking out the intended position of the ships, levelled their guns accurately for that distance, and then closed up their embrasures by piling sandbags under the breasts of their guns. When the day came it was so fine that the fleet went much nearer in towards the shore. The enemy began firing away without observing this; the consequence was that the most of their shot went over, cutting up the rigging a great deal but seldom striking the hulls; and in consequence of the thick smoke which enveloped everything, they never discovered their error till near the end of the action, when they made their shots tell much better; but it was too late then to do us much injury.

On 3rd November, at one o'clock, the ships went into action, anchoring in a semicircle embracing the whole sea front of the town. They immediately began pouring in their broadsides, the Austrians threw in rockets, and the steamers their heavy shells. The enemy returned the fire with very great spirit.

Thus far we have given the earlier incidents of our author's life in his own words. Between then and the time of his leaving the service, a hiatus is filled in by members of his own family, and the memoirs which follow are also contributed by them and by Mr Colin M'Vean.[1]

On 2nd December of this year (1840), a violent storm occurred

[1] Reginald Graham and Mrs Graham—Mr H. D. Graham's brother and mother—and Mr Colin M'Vean, Mr Graham's almost daily companion when in Iona.—Ed.

in the Mediterranean, and the ships on the Syrian coast were in imminent peril. The 'Pique' frigate dragged her anchor, and narrowly escaped going ashore. The 'Zebra,' less fortunate, did go ashore, and became a wreck, but the crew were providentially saved. This happened in the Bay of Acre, just under Mount Carmel. On the mountain looking over the sea there is a convent. The good monks prayed for the sailors during the terrible storm, and showed the greatest kindness and hospitality to the shipwrecked crew. For three months the crew of the 'Zebra' remained, living in tents at Caiffa, till they were taken off by the 'Castor.' During this time cases of plague manifested themselves among the seamen of the 'Zebra'; thirteen were attacked and nine died. They underwent great hardships, but from these young Graham never suffered harm, being blessed with a strong constitution.

After this the next station to which he was appointed was the North American. He served the usual time on this station, then came home and passed for lieutenant, but soon after left the service.

Mr Graham showed early a remarkable talent for drawing. Even as a boy his habit was to draw everything he wished to remember. During his voyages and life on board ship he collected in this way a great number of sketches of places and of incidents. These he arranged later in books, so making an illustrated journal of his travels and life at sea. His lively interest in all he saw and in the people he met, combined with his excellent memory and power of description, made him a most agreeable companion.

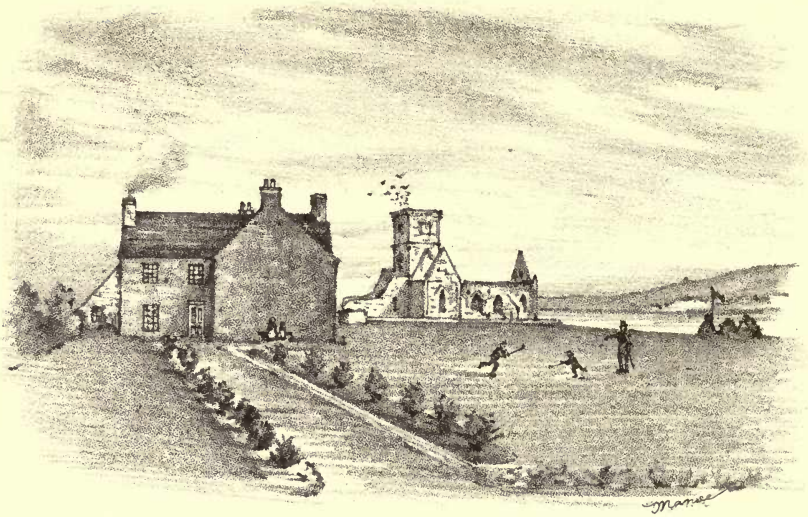
In the year 1848 young Graham went on a visit to the Rev. D. M'Vean, the Free Church minister of the island of Iona. This visit extended far beyond what was originally intended, and he remained for some years at this wild residence. He did not pass the time in idleness. He devoted himself to boating and wild-fowl shooting, and to a study of the antiquities of the ancient church of St Columba, the crumbling remains of whose monuments he rescued from oblivion in a work published by him in 1850, containing faithful and carefully-drawn plates.[1] This work was dedicated to the Duke of Argyll, and was very well received by antiquarians and by the public in general.

He also devoted much attention to natural history, especially to the ornithology of the western islands of Scotland. This led to his corresponding with some naturalists, such as Sir William Jardine and Mr Wood of Yorkshire, and to his being made a Corresponding Member of the Natural History Society of Glasgow, for which society he wrote the letters now published after so many years.

Mr Graham's own words, quoted from his diaries of these years, best describe his Iona life :—

"Came to Iona on the 24th January 1848, after two days' journey across Mull in a severe snowstorm. Arrived at the Free Manse at night. For the first few days employed in surveying the ruins and exploring the island. I almost immediately began to take drawings of the tombstones to exhibit to friends at home; but I had not the least idea when commencing these that they would ever have been engraved and brought before the

[1] *Antiquities of Iona.* Day & Son, London. 1850.



public. The first I did were the three M'Lean's effigies and M'Kinnon's cross in Reileag Orain. I worked so hard at these drawings that by the middle of July I had them all completed, with the exception of a few which I added after having sent my book to England."

Regarding these first results of our author's work in Iona, his old friend and daily companion there, Mr Colin M'Vean, who has furnished the Editor with a short notice of the life in Iona, says :—

"Among the first works undertaken by him in Iona was a series of drawings of the ruins of the cathedral, nunnery, and chapels, and the many interesting and beautifully-sculptured tombstones of chiefs, warriors, prelates, and others, renowned in their day, whose ashes now mingle with the dust of the sacred

isle. These drawings, which are very accurate, were the first ever published really worthy of the buildings and monuments represented. The *Antiquities of Iona*, by H. D. Graham, is a most valuable and notable work, now out of print, and to be had only at a premium. It is specially valuable, as, since the drawings were made, time and the tramp of many tourists' feet have done much to obliterate inscriptions and the more delicate tracery on the ancient tombs. It should be mentioned, however, that the Duke of Argyll has done much of late to protect these interesting ruins and monuments from the dangers indicated."

Mr Graham continues his MS.:—

"In July 1848 I got the 'Scarbh' built at the neighbouring village of Kintra, and this little boat was a never-failing source of amusement during the whole time I was at Iona. She was only nine feet in the keel, but drew a great deal of water, carried a great deal of sail, and stood a heavy sea; in short, a very powerful boat for her size."

We are indebted to Mr C. M'Vean for a few further particulars of the 'Scarbh' and dinghy, so prominent in Mr Graham's "Heart-pictures," as follows:—

"In addition to the 'Scarbh' already mentioned, he had a smaller boat, made by cutting an old skiff in two, and converting the bow end into a punt. In this he would paddle round the shores alone, enjoying his favourite pastime of watching the birds, the 'Scarbh' being employed in longer expeditions, such as to Staffa, Soay, Gribun, &c. At times, in the opinion of the islanders, he was too adventurous and rash, and though on more than one occasion his friends were in considerable

anxiety on his account, he always turned up safe and sound in the end. He several times passed the night alone on one of the small islands, sometimes storm-stayed, at other times engaged in watching some rare bird. A favourite excursion used to be to the island of Soay, about two and a half miles south-west of Iona. The stretch of sea and coast-line, and the numerous inlets between Port Ronan in Iona and that island, are at all seasons rich in bird-life. During the winter months they are the favourite haunts of wild geese of various kinds, chiefly the greylag and bernacle; seals and otters, too, make them their home."

Mr Graham here continues his MS.:—

"Having completed the drawings of the *Antiquities*, I amused myself by making a collection of clan tartans, and painting specimens of each variety for placing in a scrap-book; besides, I now commenced the study of ornithology, which I have ever since pursued with great vigour. I went out daily in pursuit of specimens to make drawings of, beginning with the black guillemot, scart, curlew, gulls, and golden plovers, though when I afterwards had made greater progress in the art of bird-drawing, I destroyed most of these first efforts."

As Mr Colin M'Vean's MS. at this point is very descriptive of the scenes our author dwelt amongst, we do not apologise for introducing them in this place, as follows:—

"In spring and summer these islands are the breeding places of gulls, terns, eider ducks, black guillemots, rock pigeons, petrels, and many other species needless to mention now, as they will all be found in the list attached. The Soay picnic

was always a delight to Graham and his friends, the pleasure being enhanced perhaps by a spice of danger. The island is surrounded by shoals and hidden dangers that at all times, and very specially with certain winds and at certain states of the tide, render the approach and landing matters to be gone about with caution. Has the reader ever run the gauntlet between a sunk rock on which the sea heavily breaks, and a steep headland, every now and then reached by a heavier sea than ordinary, rushing with foaming crest over the outlying rock? If so, he or she will understand and appreciate the excitement often attending a landing on Soay. The landing effected, the small island, though familiar to the usual members of the party, seemed ever new and alive with fresh interest.

"As the writer was sailing with Graham one day, and passing along the west coast of Iona, where the rocks are highest, the latter stopped the boat and landed near the marble quarry, asking his companion to look after the boat till his return. He took the painter and anchor ashore with him, and was soon lost to sight on the heights above. He had kept the object of his landing a secret. Near this spot a cave runs in from the shore; it enters from the sea and forms a high narrow fissure in the cliff, running inland for a considerable distance, and naturally roofed in part. An opening occurs in the level ground above, through which, on looking down the white sandy bottom of the cave, can be seen at low water, or when the tide is high, the sea washing still further inland, where, at the extreme end, there is another funnel-shaped opening to the upper world. Looking down the first opening,

some 40 or 50 feet sheer down, a natural arch is seen spanning the cave, and on this arch a rock pigeon's nest in the proper season. Graham had determined to get the eggs, which he knew were now in the nest. Fixing the anchor securely in the ground above, he let the rope hang down into the cave. The rope, he found, would just reach the arch; so, letting himself over, he proceeded to descend. But his hands being wet, he found he could not hold on properly, and, to his horror, felt himself slipping faster and faster, till with a rush he passed the ledge, dropped off the rope, and landed on his back on the sand below, some 60 or 70 feet from the top. Of course, having the rope to hold on to for so much of the distance broke his fall, and he escaped with a considerable shaking and a sore head. After recovering somewhat from the effects of the fall, he managed to scramble again to the upper ground through the opening further inland, which, unlike the other, was not quite sheer down. The anchor was still in position, so a happy thought struck him. He filled his hands with sand, and, despite his previous experience, again ventured down. This time, thanks to the sand giving him a better grip, he succeeded, and brought the eggs down to the boat in triumph. This is but a sample of his almost daily adventures. I may mention that a few days after this exploit a red-legged crow's nest of eggs was taken from a neighbouring cave under somewhat similar circumstances, bar the fall." [1]

These few incidents will perhaps be sufficient to give some slight idea of Henry Graham's ordinary daily life while resid-

[1] The incident above referred to is illustrated under Letter VIII.—Ed.

ing in Iona. It should be mentioned, however, that besides the *Antiquities* and the bird collection, Graham made drawings of the fish and mammalia found around and in the island. He also took a great interest in the ancient history of Iona, and the traditions attached to it, which he collected along with tales of the second sight, &c. Indeed, there was little that escaped his notice or that he did not investigate.

He was a man of rare gifts, and his memory is still green in the island he loved. All who were privileged to enjoy his friendship were devoted to him.

On leaving Iona he writes :—

"With great regret I leave my dear friends the M'Veans. They will miss me very much, and I shall equally miss their society and companionship. I cannot leave the well-known rocks, and bays, and glens of Iona, my boats and the wild birds, without feelings of tenderness and sorrow."

Retrospect of time spent in Iona in 1854 :—

"My time in Iona was chiefly spent in reading, writing, and drawing, shooting and boating.

"As to drawing, besides the *Antiquities of Iona*, I drew the birds of Iona, by which I gained facility in drawing objects of natural history, and kept a memorial of my feathered friends. Besides these, I did no set pieces, but I formed a collection of 'Heart-pictures,' small scraps illustrative of our usual occupations, as pictorial records of this period of my life."

It may be worth while in this place to record in the words of his friend, Mr Colin M'Vean, a further account of our author's literary labours. Mr M'Vean says :—"It was not, however, till

the *Antiquities of Iona* was fairly in the hands of the subscribers that Graham's full attention was given to the birds. At first, though a clever artist, his bird-pictures lacked the life and action latterly attained, and as he himself tells us, the first attempts would not in a very short time bear comparison with the later productions; so, as occasion offered and a good specimen was found, the old picture was destroyed and replaced by a more perfect representation. The peculiar charm of Graham's bird-pictures lies in their being so true to nature; he spent not hours but days and weeks before making a drawing of any bird, in closely watching its habits and attitudes, studying its different notes and calls, and trying to find out, if possible, what each meant in bird-language. He noted these calls as well as the attitudes and habits of the bird, and it is this intimate acquaintance with the living bird in its daily life and natural habitat which gives that interest to Graham's pictures and notes which few ordinary illustrations or descriptions are capable of inspiring. To the writer, his companion in many a delightful bird-hunting expedition, the memory of these days is as fresh as of yesterday, and the enthusiasm of Graham kindled in himself a love of the study of bird-life that has served to give special interest to many a lonely hour when far from home and friends."

Graham had a wonderful gift—what our American cousins would call a magnetic power—of interesting those about him in his own pursuits and studies; and, as people from far and near sent him specimens of anything shot that seemed in any way out of the common, he in this way procured many interesting specimens.

Mr Graham continues:—

"I had never shot to any extent till I came here, but carrying the gun was the constant, never-failing resource of all my out-of-door hours, all the years of my stay in Iona. Every rock and every turning among its rugged cliffs and wave-worn caverns were familiar to me, and had been the scene of some shooting adventure either by sea or land. No wonder that I should have such an affection for Iona, where every stone has a story in it for me."

The family memoir here again takes up the thread of life.

This year (1854) Mr Graham left Iona and married in England. He then went out to Canada with his wife, where they spent two years. During this time he made a number of drawings of the birds and flowers of Canada, which, according to his habit, he arranged with notes into scrap-books. He also made a collection of Canadian sketches illustrative of life both in Toronto and in the country of Upper Canada.

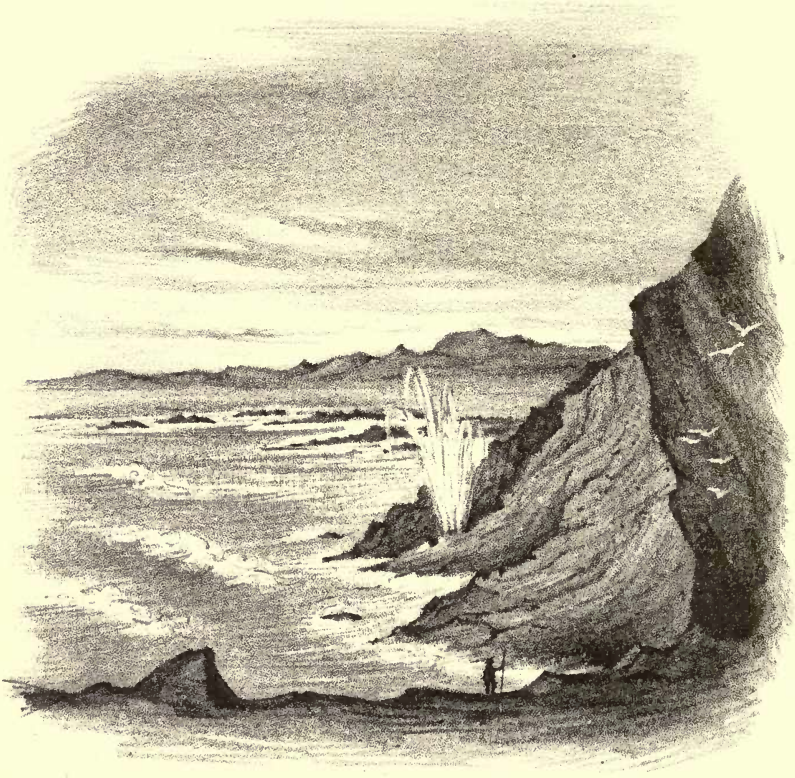
After this he returned to Scotland, all his associations and inclinations leading him to settle there. He lived on the coast of Argyllshire for some years, and although no longer able to devote himself to a sportsman's life, he delighted in sailing his own small boat about Loch Fyne. He continued his interest in archæology and natural history, and made a number of drawings and sketches of the neighbourhood.[1]

In 1866 Mr Graham went to live in the south of England

[1] Placed at the disposal of the Editor for use, but not taken advantage of, as but few of them relate to Iona.—Ed.

for the sake of education for his growing-up family, and to be nearer to his father and mother.

To the end of his life (1872) he kept up his interest in his old pursuits, though now only with pen and pencil; corresponding with his naturalist friends, and constantly adding to his collections of drawings.



LETTERS

FROM H. DAVENPORT GRAHAM

TO ROBERT GRAY,

Secretary of the Glasgow Natural History Society, &c.

I.

IONA, 20*th January* 1852.

ON the 9th of this month, besides a most terrific gale of wind, we also had a very heavy fall of snow. I ventured out for a short time, in hopes of meeting some "straggler." Numerous flocks of Snow Buntings (*Plectrophanes nivalis*) were cowering among the stubbles, the males in beautiful white plumage: this bunting is only a rare visitor to our island. As I was returning home, my dog chased what I thought was a large rat, for some little distance over the snow; he brought it to me unhurt, and it proved to be a Water-rail (*Rallus aquaticus*), the first I have seen here. It has lived ever since in a box, feeding on chopped meat, which it will take freely from the hand; indeed, it is so tame that it has already become an item in the family group, and when released from its box, it stalks about the hearth-rug without making the least effort to escape.

The Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus anglorum*) is common to these islands, and appears in summer. At that time we frequently see them skimming rapidly over the crests of the waves with a rapid, swallow-like flight. They are rarely seen to alight, and are so swift and restless, and only to be met with on the open sea, that it is not easy to procure many specimens. On the 12th of May last year, however, a very calm day, as I was going to Staffa with a party in a boat, we approached a number of very large flocks of Shearwaters *swimming* upon the water.[1] They were very tame, and I procured a considerable number. At their first appearance I mistook them for the Common Guillemots which at that time of the year "stud the seas." By their arriving here in such large flocks at the time of migration, and their being seen here during the whole summer, it is natural to suppose that they breed in the neighbourhood, and in fact I got an egg at Staffa which, I have no doubt, is one of theirs. It was in a hole in a grassy bank upon the summit of one of the basaltic cliffs overhanging the sea. It was past the breeding-time, and a few fragments of shells of eggs that had been hatched were strewed upon the ground and attracted our attention, and we discovered one egg (an addled one) by itself in a hole. It was about the size of a Pigeon's egg, white, and a perfect oval, being equally blunt at both ends. The shell had the dead, unpolished appearance which characterises the egg of the Puffin, Stormy Petrel, and

[1] Manx Shearwaters frequently alight upon the water in the vicinity of their principal breeding haunts and favourite fishing grounds. At times hundreds—and we believe we have witnessed thousands—may be seen to congregate upon the surface of a calm sea. We have never, however, witnessed such gatherings in the vicinity of Iona, but repeatedly in the narrow seas around their principal breeding stations.—Ed.

Cormorant. I searched this bank again last season, but in all my egg-hunting tours I never met with another. There were Puffins breeding in the neighbourhood, but their egg is as large as a Common Hen's egg, and of a rounder shape. I have no doubt the Shearwater breeds at St Kilda, and probably at many of the other Hebrides.

I fell in with two specimens of the Bridled Guillemot (*Uria lachrymans*) last year, both early in the spring, when the Common Guillemots were beginning to arrive. I shall keep a sharp look-out for them at the same season this year. I met a gentleman last summer who had visited Barra, and he said that he found this bird breeding there, and the natives were well acquainted with it.

The Golden Eyes (*Clangula vulgaris*) are plentiful in winter, especially in a fresh-water loch, at a small distance off, in Mull.

The Eider Duck (*Somateria mollissima*) is very frequently seen, though generally females and immature birds; at the neighbouring island of Colonsay they breed in great numbers. They abound there to such an extent that the bird is known by no other name upon these coasts but the Colonsay Duck. The Shieldrake (*Tadorna vulpanser*) is equally abundant; and in a visit that I paid to that island, during May of last year, I got as many specimens as I wished.

The Black Guillemot (*Uria grylle*) is the commonest bird we have, next to the Gulls; it is an interesting little bird, from the various states of its plumage. It breeds in great numbers upon the isles; and we have reared its young, though they always fly away when full grown; yet they and young Puffins become very familiar.

I am afraid I can add nothing to your knowledge of Plovers; they are not abundant. A few Peewits (*Vanellus cristatus*) breed on the island. The Golden Plover only visits the shores in frosty weather, but they are very abundant on the moors in Mull, and still more so at the island of Tiree. The Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) is common. There are some patches of gravelly beach which are always frequented by considerable flocks, especially at ebb-tide; or at high-water they will be found in some particular spots among the low sand-hills in the immediate neighbourhood, but they never seem to stray far from these favourite grounds and roosting-places. Upon the approach of an intruder, they commence their wild, plaintive whistle, at the same time running away before him; sometimes one will conceal himself behind a bunch of cast seaweed or a stone, till the near approach of danger sets him running off to overtake his companions. Thus they will go on, always hurrying across the patches of white sand, and lingering upon the portions of gravel, as they well know that on the former they are very conspicuous, while on the latter they are almost invisible. Upon a too near or rapid approach, or any sudden movement, especially levelling a gun, up they all jump, fly out to sea, tack, fly close past their disturber, tack again two or three times, which they all do together with military precision, giving the flock the appearance of changing its colour from white to black, and then from black to white; at last they pitch down upon the beach again, a little farther on. The best shot is when they are alighting, as at all other times they keep very much scattered.

A few Ringed Dotterels remain to breed in the island, at

which time their plumage becomes very beautiful, and their bills and legs an intense orange yellow. They apparently fly about a good deal at night, as their whistle may be frequently heard in the dark, and often inland and in places where they are never seen in the daytime.

There is very little difference between the plumage of the Rock Dove (*Columba livia*), male, female, and young. When first off the nest, the young pigeon is of a darker shade of purple, with very little lustre; the adult male, when in full pride of feather, is of a very pale, delicate tint of lavender, and his neck glistens with the hue of the emerald and carbuncle. I suppose that of all domestic animals none are so easily reclaimed as the Pigeon. Though taken fully fledged from the nest, they immediately become reconciled to the dovecot, and are as bold and familiar as the other Pigeons, which have been born and bred for many generations back in slavery. How different is the Wild Duck! Though the eggs, taken early from the heathery nest by the loch side, are placed in the barn under the careful bosom of an old clucking hen, yet the young brood, though thus ushered into the world in the midst of civilisation, from the moment of their extrusion from the egg till their dying day, always exhibit their hereditary distrust of man, and retain much of their original wildness; always ready to use their wings in preference to their legs; upon any insult ready to bid a long adieu, and return to their paternal wildnesses; and it is not till the third or fourth generation that they become fully civilised, domestic farm-yard waddlers.

The Skua is a very rare bird about our shores, and I am very

little acquainted with it. In an old edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* it is mentioned by the name of "Parasiticus," as very common and breeding at Islay and Jura; but it seems now to have nearly deserted those shores.

The Turnstone (*Strepsilas interpres*) is very numerous here; in winter large flocks feed upon the shores at ebb-tide; and during the flood they assemble upon the rocks. They are always to be found upon the little unfrequented rocky islets, wandering about the seaweed-covered rocks, almost within reach of the wash of the surf. They seem to feed as much in this manner as upon the gravelly beaches. During severe storms they sometimes come a little way inland to the sandy fields. They are generally tame and stand well together, and so give a good shot. Last year I met with flocks as late as the 28th of May; the birds had nearly acquired their summer plumage. On the 8th of June the flocks had entirely disappeared, but a few pairs remained in different spots, and these were in most brilliant plumage—very unlike their sombre winter garb, the body covered with a combination of red, black, and white, giving the appearance of tortoise-shell, and the neck and breast curiously marked with black and white. In fact, they were in full breeding dress; and I suppose these pairs must have remained here with the intention of nesting in this country.

The mode I generally adopt now to destroy life in birds, whether wounded or not, is by tying a loop in a bit of twine, putting it over the bird's head, suddenly pulling it tight by both ends, and in a few seconds life is extinct with apparently little pain. It is almost the only effectual way of killing some of the

stronger sea-fowl, which are remarkably tenacious of life. It does not hurt the skin, if it is required, as the loop will easily open again, especially if the horse-hair *snooding* of a fish-hook is used. It is certainly a much neater manner than that of knocking

the wounded bird's head against the side of the boat, or a stone, which disfigures it very much, and causes the blood to flow so much as to make it disagreeable to carry in the pocket. I have practised it now so long that I lasso my victims with as much

paternal kindness as the Grand Signor bowstrings his superannuated ministers.

This letter has been detained for a week, as during this furious weather our posts are few and far between. One of our unfortunate Mull postmen perished in the last snowstorm. His wife was the first person to discover his body lying stark and stiff in a snowdrift not many hundred yards from his own door.

II.

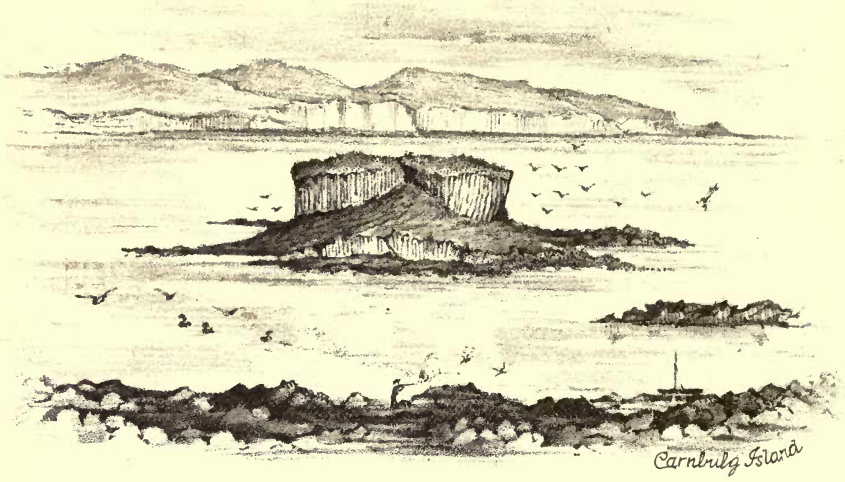
IONA, 30*th January* 1852.

THE STORM PETREL (*Thalassidroma pelagica*).

THIS interesting and most diminutive member of the great order of *Natatores* visits our coasts in considerable numbers during the summer for the purpose of incubation. On fine calm evenings at this time of the year, after the smooth surface of the deep has put off the fiery glow imparted by the setting sun, and begins to assume the dull, leaden tint of night, then the little Petrel may be seen soaring along the face of the sea; now he darts past the fisher's boat as it is rowing along upon its homeward course; is seen for a moment as he flits round the lagging oars, and instantly disappears among the increasing gloom of approaching night. His motions are so rapid, his appearance so sudden, and he looks so extremely diminutive, that it is only a quick eye that will detect

his approach at all, and it would be almost impossible for the homeward bound sea-fowl shooter to molest him.

The Petrel breeds upon many of the little wild unfrequented islands which surround Iona and Staffa; the latter itself is one station. But upon these islands I have found their nests made in such very dissimilar positions that it would make one suppose they belonged to distinct species. The first place that I fell in with them was on a little islet about a league south of Iona, named Soay. It is high and rocky, with grassy banks on its summit, which feed about a dozen sheep; these banks, which are about eighty feet above the level of the sea, are composed of a soft buttery kind of soil, which cuts, with a spade, like new cheese; and it is in deep burrows formed in this muddy soil that the Petrels make their nest. These banks are perforated by numbers of holes, having the size and appearance of rabbit burrows. If one of these is carefully cut out with a spade, two, or sometimes three, very small apertures, no larger than mouse holes, are discovered opening out of this large entrance, which serves as a lobby to as many distinct Petrel residences. By continuing to dig up the course of these minute galleries, which extend from three to four feet in length, and are at a considerable depth below the surface, we at last come to a small nest composed of a little dried grass, generally of a *sea pink*, loosely laid together, containing a single white egg; the egg is quite warm, and by searching a little further the bird is sure to be found. It allows itself to be caught and taken up without resistance, only giving a faint squeak, and then ejects about a teaspoonful of thick yellow oil from its bill; the quantity and quality of this



Carnburg Island

Gathering Carrigeen at Soay

decreases as the season advances, and latterly ceases altogether; this is probably accounted for by the birds falling off in condition during the time of sitting.[1]

The direction of the galleries may be ascertained by thrusting up a ramrod, for they take frequent and abrupt windings; a large block of the soil may then be cut out with a spade; and the soil, though soft, is so tenacious that these blocks may all be returned to their places again; and the burrow not being destroyed, is sometimes tenanted again next season. The birds come to their holes in the first week in June; the eggs are laid by the first week in July; and on the 13th of October I have found the young very recently hatched. I once kept a pair and succeeded in rearing one; the other one was killed by accident. They would take small pieces of fish very readily, and were more active at night than during the day. The young one when fully fledged differed from the adult merely in being of a rustier black, and having an ill-defined white mark across the wing, formed by the pale tips of the secondaries. Both the young and the old ones, when confined in a basket or bag, escape at the smallest aperture, climbing up the sides like mice, in doing which they

[1] When reading this account of the Petrel galleries of Soay or elsewhere, it should be borne in mind that some of these same tunnelled dwellings may be occupied by very different animals. Thus Shieldrakes use them, and also the Otter. But Otters' holes are easily distinguished, having no side tunnels, and being much more extensive, reaching to a distance at times of 15 feet in length, with an average diameter of 12 inches, the sides and roof being smoothly polished by the rubbing of the animals' fur in passing out and in; with circular or oval chambers, in which they rest, occurring at intervals; and the drainage system admirably adapted to carry off superfluous water; and the rejectamenta of their feasts carefully disposed in a side chamber a foot or more from the entrance of the tunnel. Such a habitation we ourselves have seen in Soay.—Ed.

use their hooked bills to pull themselves up with: it seems to be of more service to them than their claws.

As might be expected from their great length of wing they cannot spring up quickly into the air; when one is allowed to escape from the hand, he runs rapidly along the ground for several yards with the wings in motion before he can get fairly started; but if he meets with any declivity, he throws himself off and swoops away to his ocean home. Within the limited space of a room their wings are quite useless.

Returning from Staffa

The Petrel is also found breeding at Staffa, and at least at one of the Treshnish Islands, though I have no doubt they frequent all of them. Here their nesting-places are very different from those at Soay, for they make their nests under the large stones on the beach. These beaches are composed of blocks of basalt, about the size of a hat, and are considerably raised above the sea level. They seem never to have been much exposed to the action of the waves, for

these large stones are rugged and angular, consequently lying loosely together, easily allowing the mouse-like Petrel to penetrate the numerous interstices, and to circulate freely a long way below the surface, just as we see a Wren, chased by a dog, taking refuge in a dry stone dike; and while the dog keeps watching the hole at which he entered, in a moment the Wren hops out of the dike a gun-shot further on, and chirps a feeble insult at his pursuer. It would be impossible ever to discover the Petrel in such a situation as this, were it not for its betraying itself, which it does in a peculiar manner, especially about dusk, in the evening, or at sunrise. If you happen to be upon one of these wild solitary spots, you hear a most peculiar buzzing noise, not unlike that of a spinning-wheel, or a goat-sucker. It is not continuous, for at intervals of about ten seconds it is broken by a sharp *click*. You soon find this music issues from beneath your feet; guided by the sound, you commence removing the heavy stones; you are encouraged in your labour by hearing the sound nearer and more distinct; sometimes it ceases, then recommences; the noise and rolling of the rocks seem to provoke the subterranean musician to renewed efforts, until with a vigorous effort the last great stone is rooted out, and the mystery is laid bare. We see a little black object shuffling off, its small white egg lying upon a few blades of dry grass to protect it from the hard rock. The bird scarcely makes an effort to escape; as if dazzled by the broad glare of daylight, or stunned by the depth of its misfortune, it lies passively in the hand of its captor, gives a faint squeak, and drops a pellucid tear, in the shape of a globule of oil, from its beak.

I have compared specimens taken from these two different breeding-places, but I am unable to detect any difference between them. The Soay bird is always silent;[1] I never heard him indulge in these curious melodies. Both have a very powerful odour—a musky kind of smell, which adheres to the skins years after they are stuffed, and to everything they come in contact with. I have perceived it when walking upon the beaches at Carnbulg Island, and at Soay it needs no terrier to inform you which holes are inhabited.

III.

IONA, 17*th February* 1852.

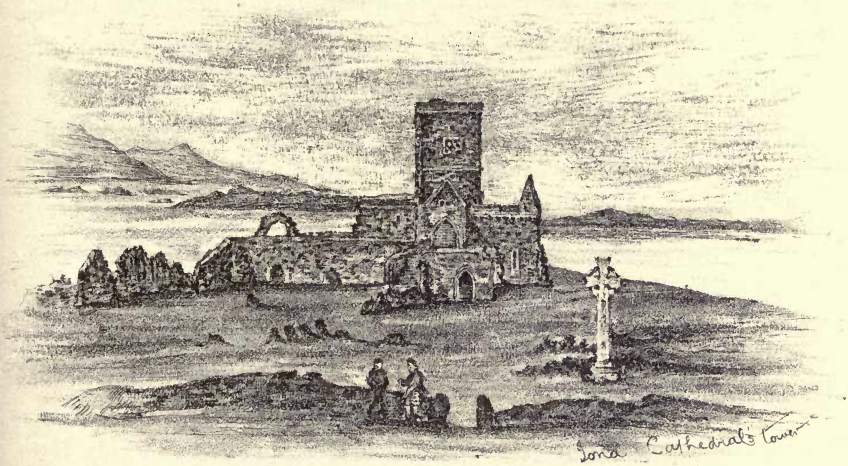
THE RED-LEGGED CROW (*Fregilus graculus*).

WE have three pairs of these birds constantly resident upon the island, and there are several other pairs which make their nests upon the adjacent rocky shores of Mull. The Iona birds breed every season upon the island, and usually roost during the rest of the year somewhere in the vicinity of their old nests; but though they rear a young brood every season, these are sent off

[1] It almost appears from our author's remarks that this curious melody is sung to the song of the sad sea-waves rolling up the pebbly-strewn shore; and that they may be partially induced by the monotony of the surrounding sounds; and further, that in the deep loam of the peaty chambers of Soay a greater silence is upon the inhabitants of the Petrelry, owing to the greater surrounding silence.—ED.

as soon as fledged to seek for other shores; and the same limited number only remains with us.

The Chough is a very pleasing bird; his movements are active and sprightly; he is always in the highest spirits, bustling about, calling and responding to his mate. His voice somewhat resembles the Jackdaw's, but it is much more cheerful and lively, having a clear ringing sound. Chow! chow! chow! he cries till all the distant caves resound with his own name.



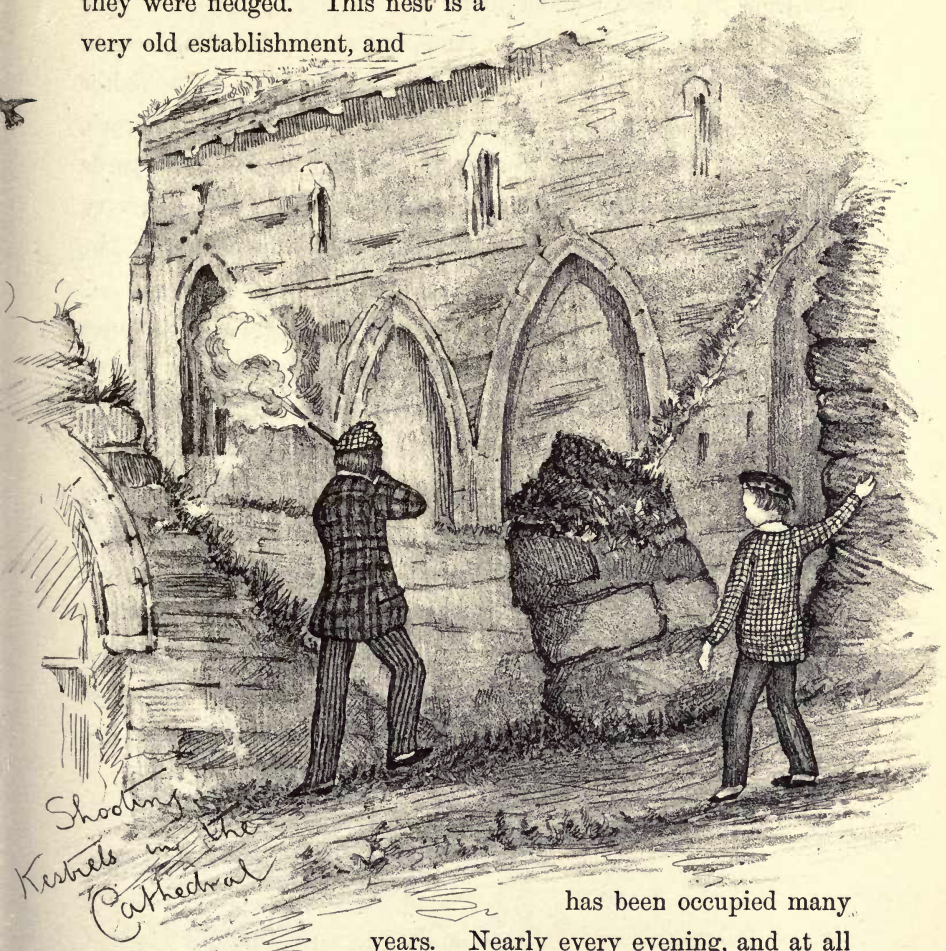
These birds always maintain a friendly footing with the Jackdaws, associating with them in their feeding excursions, and sometimes accompanying them home. The huge square tower of St Columba's venerable shrine, grizzled with age, moss-grown and roofless, still braves the shocks of time and the fury of the elements, and affords secure shelter to a colony of Jackdaws among its time-worn shafts and decaying windows. The belfry walls which once vibrated to the merry-pealing chimes or the

sadly-tolling knell now only awaken to the chattering voices of *Daws*. But, however this may be, the Jackdaws look upon the old tower as their exclusive property; and if any audacious Hooded Crow or Kestrel ventures to alight upon it, in a moment he is hustled off by the whole community, perhaps with the loss of some of his tail feathers. One pair of Red-legs are, however, allowed by these jealous republicans to rear their family in the midst of them; and also at other times of the year they are welcome guests to roost upon their tower. This nest was built last year in the ledge of a small window on the very summit of the tower upon the inside; though quite out of reach, the outer sticks could be seen from below. We waited patiently, hoping that some of the young family, when nearly fledged, would fall over; but I suppose they were destroyed by some days of severe wind and rain which we had about that time, for the old ones deserted the nest afterwards. We, however, picked up the fragments of some of the egg-shells which had fallen aftert he eggs were hatched; they were of a light brownish tint, spotted with dark brown.[1]

Another nest is in the mouth of a cave which can only be entered at low-water. The nest is inaccessible, and visible from below, but not from above. If very much wished for it might perhaps be reached with the help of a rope. We left it un-

[1] At the present time the Chough has ceased to occupy any of the sites mentioned above by our author. It seems still a question whether the requirements of the Republic of the Daws have not effected this dislodgment of their more highly-bred cousins, or whether, as suggested in the text further on (*vide* Letter XVII.), the circumstances under which the two species can thrive are not somewhat altered of late years, those favourable to the Daw being unfavourable, or less favourable, to the Chough.—Ed.

molested last year in hopes of getting the young, in which I was disappointed by being absent from the island just at the time they were fledged. This nest is a very old establishment, and



has been occupied many years. Nearly every evening, and at all times of the year, the old pair come to roost in its neighbourhood. I have sometimes watched them making themselves comfortable

for the night; after trying several, they at last select a sheltered inaccessible ledge overhanging the sea, upon which they lie down with their legs tucked under them.

These birds are at all times tame, but at the breeding season they are very bold. They do not take much notice of a visitor until very closely intruded upon, and then become very vociferous, flying over his head, and frequently alighting about forty yards distant, or less. Their brilliant coral bills and legs are then very conspicuous, as they contrast with the glossy blackness of the plumage.

Sometimes on a fine calm day the Red-legged Crow amuses itself by soaring up to a great height, and then sailing round and round in circles, after the manner of the Eagle. One fine spring morning I witnessed a pair doing this when I was accompanied by a veteran sportsman, who was almost deceived by them, taking them for Eagles, until they began to call, which at once betrayed them; and when they descended, the matter was put beyond a doubt by shooting one. The natives call these birds St Columba's bird; no doubt because it used to breed upon the cathedral in greater numbers formerly, when those ruins were less disturbed by steam-boat visitors.

IV.

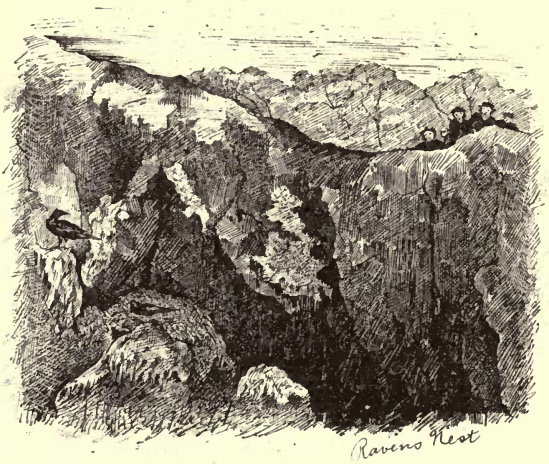
Iona, *4th March* 1852.

The Raven's Nest, and Egg Collecting.

We have now fortunately begun to enjoy some pleasant weather, and I took advantage of the very first of the fine days to launch my boat and go round to the back of the island, to make an attempt upon a flock of Long-tailed Ducks, which have been there all the winter; and I succeeded in killing a pair of fine males. One of them was in such fine plumage, and so little hurt, that I felt sorry I could not send him to you as he then appeared, looking beautiful even in death, without having to spoil his good looks by our clumsy hands in the operation of taking his jacket off.

A fine accessible Raven's nest, full of eggs, was wantonly destroyed by a boat's crew of blackguard fishermen last year. The nest had been there for a course of years, and the natives never meddled with it. It is on a wild, secluded cliff overhanging the sea, and the place was not *canny!* Voices were heard there —the thin voices of spirits! The Raven is not a canny bird, especially those who were under special spiritual protection; and so there it remained. I never heard of it till last year, as, I suspect, it was intentionally concealed from me; for when I did discover it, several of the islanders, including the village tailor, begged of me most earnestly not to think of *harrying* the nest,

or in any way to interfere with the foul fiend! Unfortunately I was a day too late last year. I hope the vengeful spirit of the desecrated nest overtook the fishermen with a good ducking before they got home and a foul wind ever after! I despaired of the Ravens returning; but yesterday the old shepherd (whose heart I had just enlarged by the presentation of six inches of pigtail) informed me that the *fiach*, or Ravens, had nearly finished building their nest in the old place. I hope that I may get them if all goes right, even though it should be necessary to take a basin of holy water from St Columba's cell to dash into the nest and dislodge the *deil* from his eggs.



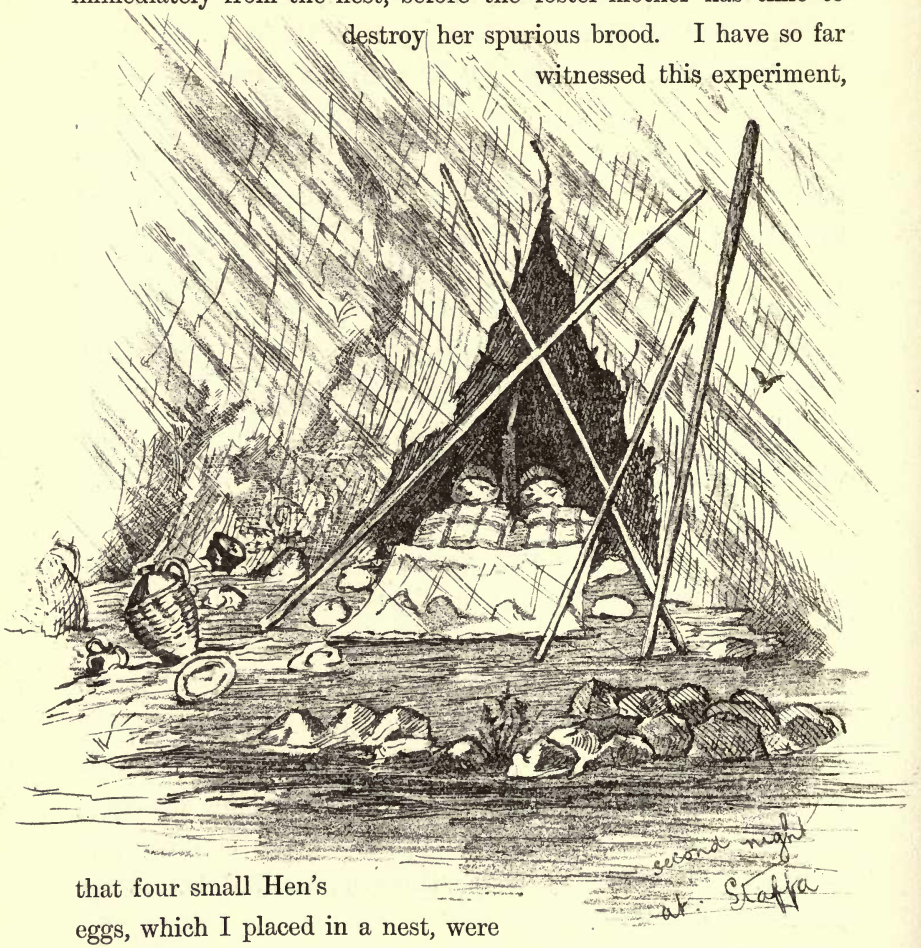
Collecting eggs, however, is as uncertain and full of disappointment as even wild-fowl shooting, and this is why I speak so cautiously in the list I have just written; for many of these eggs, though very plentiful at the islands, must be procured at exactly the right time, and from the uncertainty of the weather it is not always possible to get them. Last year, for instance, being a week too late, out of nearly every Puffin's and Black

Guillemot's hole, instead of an egg, I extracted an unpleasantly soft, downy, dirty little object, which I was glad to return again, receiving for my pains a furious nip from the old one; and a Puffin's bite is really no joke; it is as bad as a Parrot's, and he holds on like a bull-dog. The most cautious mode of proceeding, when you wish to take up a live Puffin, is to give him a gentle tap on the head to confuse him, and quickly grasp him round the neck before he has time to catch your fingers. But one cannot be cruel to a Puffin, for his comical look would make a cynic laugh.

I have not met with the Sandwich Tern here at all, though the Common and Arctic Terns—especially the latter—breed in profusion, so that we use their eggs as an article of food; but I will keep a watch for it next year. The Hooded Crow's eggs are most numerous, as these odious birds are most extraordinarily abundant, and they are very persevering in nesting, although their nests and eggs are continually destroyed. Last year I witnessed a very striking instance of this; for, finding a nest, I waited till it contained five eggs, and then took them. A few days after I examined it, and found three eggs, which I took, and destroyed the nest. About a fortnight later I found a new nest built not a gunshot from the old situation, containing four eggs, which the hen was hatching. From the lateness of the season, as well as the proximity of the situation, I hailed her as my persevering old friend.

I am informed, on undoubted authority, that it is a common trick for young people to remove the Hoody's eggs, and replace them with Bantam's eggs slightly rubbed with indigo, which the

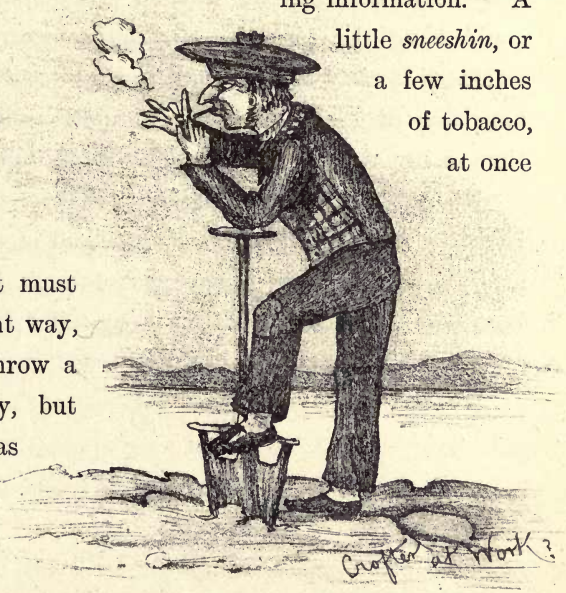
Crow hatches most faithfully; only they must be removed immediately from the nest, before the foster-mother has time to destroy her spurious brood. I have so far witnessed this experiment,



that four small Hen's eggs, which I placed in a nest, were most faithfully covered by the Crow for ten days, when unfortunately they were taken away by a mischievous boy. A much more cruel trick is that of boiling the eggs hard to prevent their

being hatched, and consequently the poor bird sits on them till she gets so exhausted as to be incapable of flying, and so falls alive into the hands of her young tormentors. A young one taken from the nest becomes a useful garden scavenger, destroying all kinds of injurious insects.[1]

I hope to get some new eggs this season, by setting the boys on the search among the moors over in Mull; but it is not easy to get the people to understand why you want eggs. St John, in his *Tour in Sutherland*, when inquiring about an eagle's nest of an old shepherd, breaks out into a lamentation upon the reserve of the Highlanders, "who seem to have a suspicious dislike to giving information." A little *sneeshin*, or a few inches of tobacco, at once goes to the heart of the old mountaineer; but it must be given in the right way, not as you would throw a beggar a halfpenny, but with such a remark as "Maybe you're out of tobacco to-day, Donald," or "Try this, Sandy, and tell me if it's good or no." The *gentle*



[1] Vide *Vertebrate Fauna of the Outer Hebrides*, p. 70.—Ed.

weed is the great mollifier among the wildest nations: the Arab exchanges pipes on meeting his friend, as an assurance of his good faith, and the American chiefs dispel the impending war-cloud by a few whiffs from the pacific calumet. Had tobacco been discovered in the Middle Ages, I will answer for it that those warlike barons would have stopped at home and smoked their pipes upon their castle walls, instead of galloping about the country cutting people's throats.

I am on the eve of starting on a trip to the north-west extremity of Mull, where there is a loch famous for Widgeon and other Ducks. I shall take a boat and one hand, touching, if it is possible, at Staffa on the way, for Geese abound there. I wish I could have the pleasure of your company: I have plenty of feathered society indeed, but I would rather, for a companion, have one of Plato's two-legged animals without feathers! The time of my absence will depend entirely upon the wind.

I began this letter intending to make a few remarks upon the habits of the Long-tailed Duck; instead of which I have rambled after birds' nests, till I have got I don't know where, so I had better conclude, and leave the Long-tailed Duck for another post.

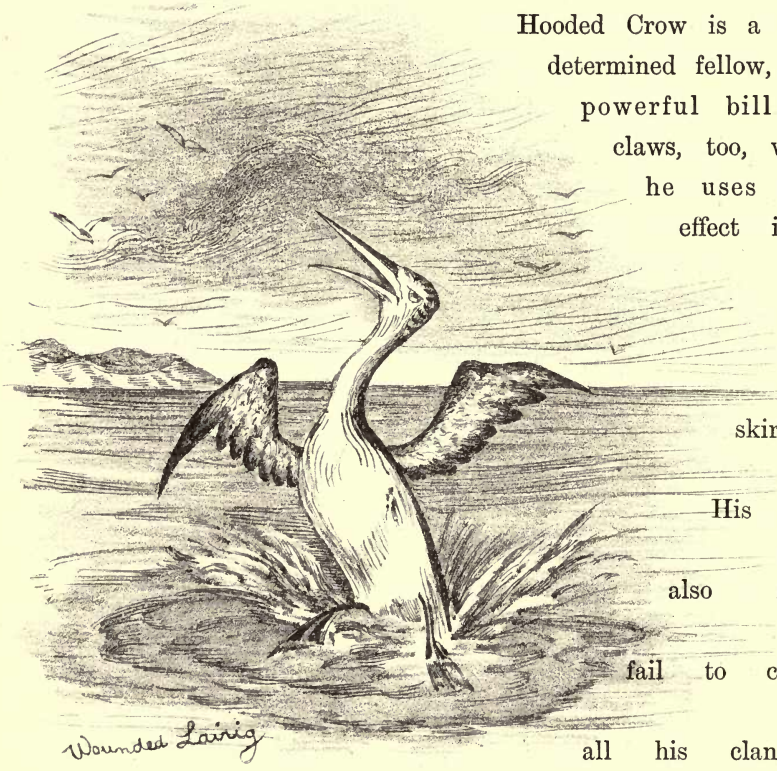
V.

IONA, *24th March* 1852.

YOU will be glad to hear that the charm of the Raven's nest has been broken; that we attempted it last week, and succeeded in *harrying* it. It contained five eggs; and I will willingly consign to you my share, though I have a companion who lays claim to half of the plunder. The nest was situated on a very dangerous cliff, not in the same place as the old nest. The beetling crag overhung it so as to make it invisible from above, except from a projecting ledge about a gunshot further on. The old shepherd had stipulated with me that the Raven was to be shot; but he was so eager to point out the right position for seeing the nest, that he obstructed my aim at the critical moment of the bird's launching herself off the nest. Shepherds of course have a hereditary hatred of Ravens, but I was glad that she escaped, as I have no grudge against her, and I could not have saved her *skin*, for she would have fallen into the stormy waves far down beneath the nest. I was disappointed in the size of the eggs, as they are not larger than those of the Hooded Crow; they are of a longer shape, and their colour is a fine deep greenish blue, and with few or no spots.

I was out walking this evening, since writing the above, and I saw the two Ravens evidently choosing a locality for trying a new nest. One of them had a piece of moss or wool in its bill.

They are apparently disposed to try the opposite side of the island for their new habitation. Though I did not go after them, for fear of frightening them from their intention, yet I have a good idea of the spot they will choose—a precipitous cliff, generally tenanted by a pair of Kestrels and several Hooded Crows. The latter seemed jealous of this encroachment, and two pairs of these Crows constantly followed them with vociferous cries. The short, angry bark of the Ravens warned them not to interfere with them; but the Hooded Crow is a bold, determined fellow, with powerful bill and claws, too, which he uses with effect in a skirmish. His cries also never fail to collect all his clan to



his assistance. In this way I have often seen Kestrels and Merlins miserably hustled; and the lordly Peregrine does not pass without being insulted. They pursue the small Hawks with great venom and fury; and although I never saw a battle terminate fatally, yet I have occasionally met with their bones and carcases. On one occasion I picked up a fine Buzzard, only a few hours dead, with no mark of violence but a slight wound upon the head. How deceased met with his death there was not sufficient evidence to prove, but I was tempted to return a verdict of wilful murder against some Hoody or Hoodies unknown.

I was disappointed in my expectations of getting Widgeon on the north-west parts of Mull, as they had got very shy since the fine weather set in, though I saw some large flocks floating about the lochs, but keeping far out of range, even of swanshot. The only good fortune I had was while rowing through the Sound of Ulva, where I saw a party of three Great Northern Divers

very busy fishing, and calling to one another with loud hoarse shouts. I rowed up close to one, and fired a charge of No. 7 into him at thirty yards, and, without stopping, held on in the direction of his consort, who had dived at the report, but rose again close to the boat, and another shot stretched her on her back. The third was not much scared, but would not let me approach him, and I was not very anxious to pursue him. These are very large birds, and they weigh, I am sure, fourteen pounds

each, though I have not weighed them yet. The skin of one is very little hurt, which I will try to preserve; they are only in their plain winter garb.

Immediately after meeting with these great monsters, I found myself surrounded by the other extreme of the family of Colymbidæ—namely, three most minute little Dabchicks, or Grebes. Their activity utterly set my shooting at defiance; and, with a heavy boat deeply laden with ballast, I could not attempt pursuing them till they were fatigued, which is the only mode of

getting them. I remembered your inquiries about Grebes; but as there are a few in our neighbourhood, in Mull, I intend to take a light punt to pursue them with, and so I will defer making any remarks concerning them till after this opportunity of studying their habits. Yesterday, in returning home from an expedition, my mate and I had to pull the entire distance, twenty-five miles; which gave us hard work from two P.M. till ten, besides a walk of ten miles over the hills in the morning.

VI.

IONA, 25*th March* 1852.

THE LONG-TAILED ICE DUCK (*Harelda glacialis*).

THIS bird comes to Iona in the early part of November, when there appears a small flock of a dozen or so, which takes up its station off the northern coast of the island. These are gradually reinforced during the frosts and severe weather of December and January by fresh arrivals which are driven in from the sea, and from their more unsheltered haunts, till at last a very great number are assembled in the bay. Towards the end of March this large flock begins to break up into pairs and small parties; many go away; and when the weather keeps fine they make long excursions, and for days the bay is quite deserted—not a Long-tail is to be seen. A change of weather, however, will still bring them back, and a smart gale would assemble a considerable flock

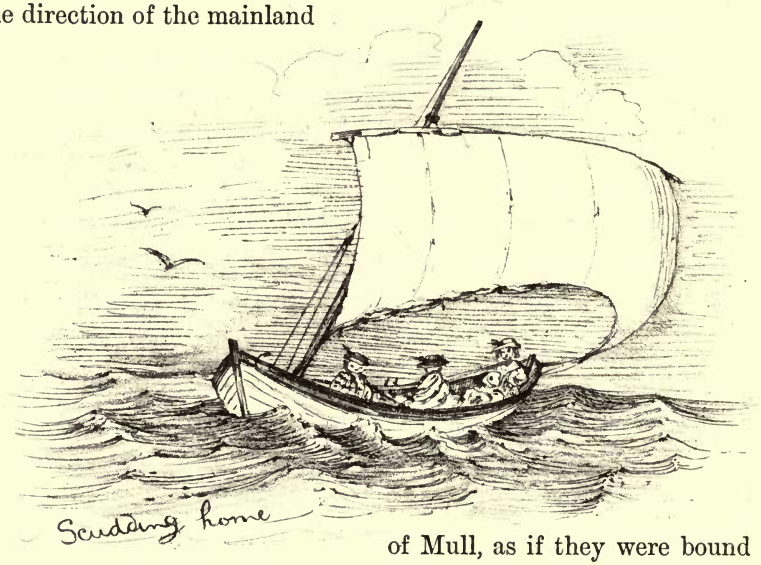
of them, and this as late as the second week in April; but after this time you see them no more. Thus we have them with us for about four months. They arrive with the first frown of winter, and depart with the earliest blink of summer sun. The Northern Hareld brings ice and snow and storms upon its wings; but as soon as winter, with his tempestuous rage, rolls unwillingly back before the smile of advancing spring, to his Polar dominions, the bird follows in his train; for no creature revels more amidst the gloom and rage and horrors of winter than the Ice Duck.

The change which takes place in the appearance of these birds during the latter part of their stay is very striking. In winter you see the flocks of Long-tails far off, twinkling like bright white stars upon the blue waves; but late in spring they become so dark that at a short distance they look very black. Last year they remained so late as the 18th of April; and I had an excellent opportunity of watching a party of them on that day. I was looking down upon them from a small eminence with a glass; and sometimes they came almost within reach of shot, so that I was able to examine them nearly as well as if they were actually in my hand. They seemed to be in full summer plumage. The males a fine deep black, something reddish about the wings when the sun caught them; curious little white caps upon their heads, and a patch of white visible behind the thigh. The females were dark brown. I got one of these, though I did not succeed in getting a male. The first time that I saw my old friends in their new costume I did not recognise them, and I was puzzled to know who they were; but at this meeting I was set at ease at once, as they were the first to speak, and then I recognised their voice.

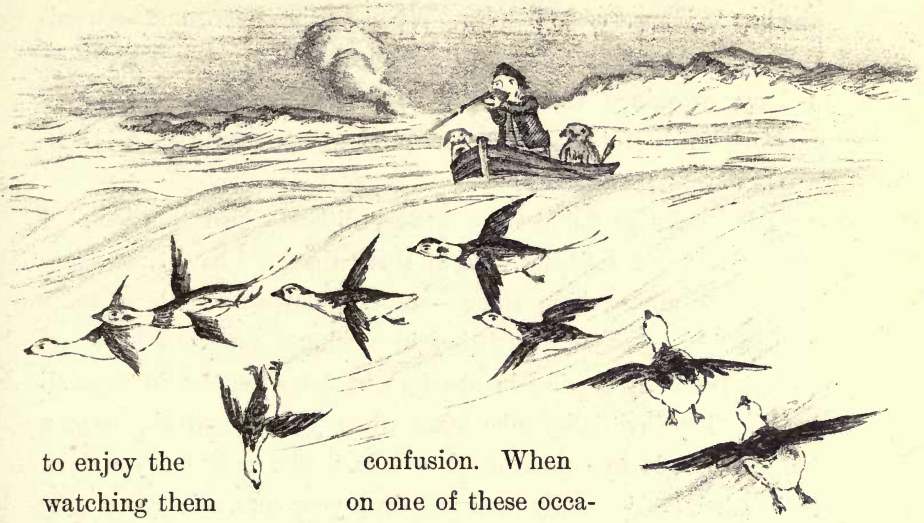
The cry of the Long-tailed Duck is very remarkable, and has obtained for it the Gaelic name of *Lach Bhinn*, or the Musical Duck, the most appropriate name for them; for when their voices are heard in concert—rising and falling—borne along upon the breeze between the rollings of the surf, the effect is musical, wild, and startling. You look around in vain to discover whence the mysterious strains proceed. "Ah!" you exclaim, "sometimes the fishermen take their bagpipes out with them to cheer their toil while rowing. But no; no boat could live among those terrible breakers, and nothing is in sight all round the murky horizon. Surely, then, I am listening to a band of Tritons and Naiads, whose music thus mingles with the splashing of the waves, to which the intermissive roar of the surf forms a fitting bass!" The united cry of a large flock sounds very like bagpipes at a distance, but the cry of a single bird when heard very near is certainly not so agreeable. On the occasion I just mentioned I took great pains to learn the note; and the following words are the nearest approach that can be given of it in writing; it articulates them very distinctly, though in a musical, bugle-like tone:—*Our, o, u, ah! our, o, u, ah!* Sometimes the note seems to break down in the middle, and the bird gets no further than *our*, or *ower*, which it runs over several times, but then, as with an effort, the whole cry is completed, loud and clear, and repeated several times, as if in triumph. At this time they were busily feeding, diving in very deep water on a sandy bottom, and calling to one another when they rose to the surface.

I never saw these Ducks come very near the shore; perhaps this is partly owing to the bay which they frequent having shores

which they could not approach easily, as there is usually a heavy surf breaking upon them. I have frequently watched them at night, to see if they would come into any of the creeks, but they never did; on the contrary, after dusk they would often leave the bay; the whole of them would fly off simultaneously in the direction of the mainland



of Mull, as if they were bound for some well-known feeding ground. I have often seen them actively feeding in the day-time, though more generally they are floating about at rest or diverting themselves. They are of a very lively and restless disposition, continually rising on the wing, flying round and round in circles, chasing one another, squattering along the surface, half-flying, half-swimming, accompanying all these gambols with their curious cries. When the storms are at their loudest, and the waves running mountains high, then their glee seems to reach its highest pitch, and they appear thoroughly



to enjoy the confusion. When watching them on one of these occasions, I had to take shelter under a rock from a dreadful blast, accompanied by very heavy snow, which in a moment blotted out the whole landscape; everything was enveloped in a shroud of mist and driving sleet; but from the midst of the intense gloom there arose the triumphant song of these wild creatures, rising above the uproar of the elements; and when the mist *lifted*, I beheld the whole flock careering about

the bay as if mad with delight. When feeding over some seaweed-covered bank, the whole party disappear, and rise again together. I have examined the contents of their stomachs, but found nothing but half-digested seaweed and great quantities of shell-sand, and pieces of coralline.

I have always found them a very difficult bird to shoot. I never could get a sitting shot at them, though I have tried every method of approaching them—running down upon them under sail, rowing to them, or drifting in a minute punt. I have had most success by coming in upon them from the sea in a small boat. They invariably take wing when you get within from a hundred yards to a quarter of a mile. The moment you hear their music begin loudly to sound, drop your oars, seize your gun; there you see the large flock rising like a black cloud off the water. Now they fly in a long straggling body to windward—there they turn!—here they come—look out! The main flock passes by out of shot; never mind, here's a small party coming straight for us; in a moment they are whistling past the boat with the swiftness of shot; no time for a *poking* aim; bang! hurra!—there's a pair of them. Load again; that shot has broken up the large flock, and small bodies are flying about in all directions; you will soon get another shot; after that they will probably fly out to sea. This is a fortunate day; but I have often had the mortification of seeing them all fly off to sea without obtaining a single shot at them.

From the various plumage of the male, female, winter, summer, young, and adult, there is a wonderful variety exhibited wherever many of these birds are congregated.

VII.

IONA, *5th April* 1852.

As to D's remarks about the Petrels' burrows being made by Rabbits, this may be a mere inaccuracy on his part; or it is very possible that the Petrels take advantage of rabbit holes when they occur upon their breeding stations, as the Puffins and Shieldrakes, I believe, do; though among our islands *these* are obliged to make holes for themselves, as there are no Rabbits to assist them. The Stormy Petrels' holes at Soay have, exteriorly, very much the appearance of rabbit burrows, but, on excavating, the resemblance ceases; there would scarcely be room for a Rabbit to conceal his whole body in one. The entrance, though wide, extends but a very slight depth below the surface of the ground; it immediately contracts into *one* or *two* very small passages, only capable of affording ingress to such a diminutive creature as a Mouse or Petrel. These large entrance halls seem to be of great age, overgrown with moss, and the small galleries seem more recently made, or at least *re-bored.*[1]

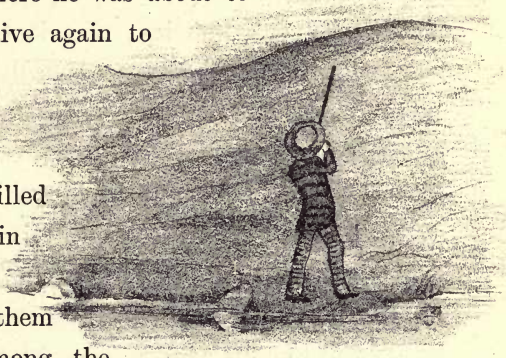
Last year I found a Wheatear's nest formed in the entrance, while the back premises were tenanted by two pairs of Petrels, who must have been forced to walk over the Wheatear's back whenever they came out. None of our small islands contain Rabbits, but if they were once introduced they would thrive and multiply wonderfully. A small rocky islet off the town of

[1] See remarks in footnote at p. 47, *antea*.—ED.

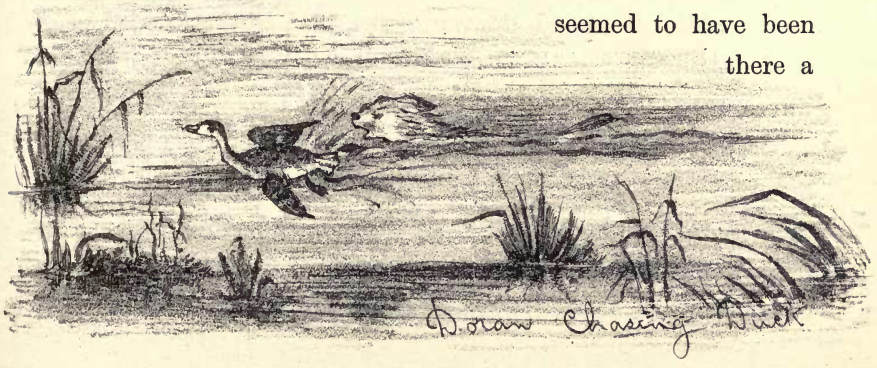
Tobermory, called *Calve Island*, was thought to be turned to some account by a former proprietor, who stocked it with Rabbits of a superior breed. In the course of time these so destroyed the pasture that a later proprietor wished to get rid of them; but they utterly defied all his efforts to extirpate them. Rabbits are abundant in Iona now, yet the man is still alive who introduced the first pair into the island. Hares were also very recently introduced into Tiree island. I have frequently met with Hares upon little islets a quarter of a mile from the mainland, which they must of course have reached by swimming; but Rabbits, I think, never take to the water, even for the shortest distance, though they frequent the seashore for the sake of seaweed. There are some tempting islands hardly a gunshot from the mainland of Iona, which are never visited by Rabbits.

Most of the small islets and rocks within a moderate distance of the coast are infested by rats, which subsist upon the shell-fish, crabs, birds' eggs, &c. Fortunately these rascals have not reached Soay; it is too far out for them, clever swimmers as they are. If they once get a footing there, they will quickly banish Petrels and every other bird from nesting there more. I was often disappointed during the egg season, when searching for sea-fowls' eggs, to find many promising-looking rocks untenanted; but I soon discovered that the cause of it was the rats had penetrated to them, and the birds instinctively avoided these spots. A few days ago my terrier turned a rat out of a hole in the sand, and being hard pressed, it boldly jumped into a small pool of water, diving immediately. The water being clear, I could see him distinctly swimming about near the bottom, exactly

like an Otter in miniature. I was very much surprised at his power of endurance. Whenever he rose towards the surface, he saw the dog's nose suspended over the spot where he was about to rise, and down he would dive again to the depths of the pool. Becoming a little exhausted at last, the dog dived down after him and killed him. You meet with rats in the most out-of-the-way situations. I have taken them in traps set for birds among the hills, and once upon a small island in the middle of a loch. The island is quite bare, and not larger than a table; so he must have swum out there on a voyage of discovery.



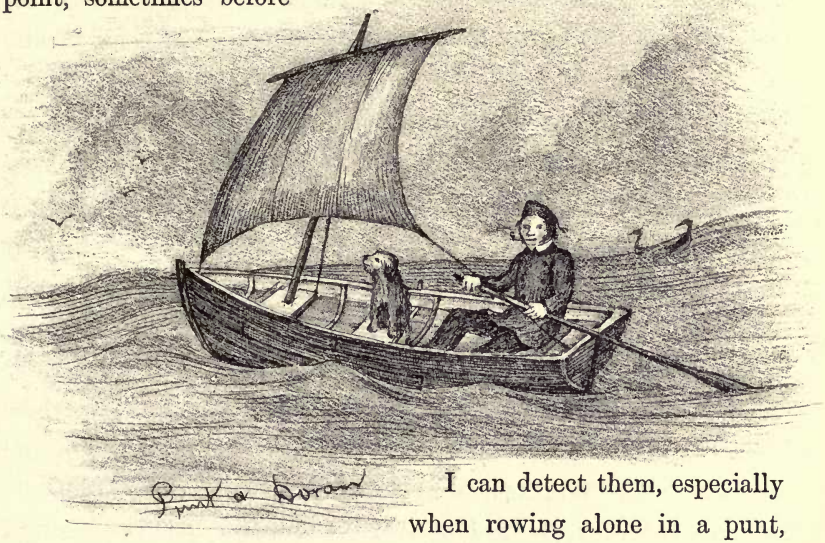
A few months ago I took a Mallard in a trap, as he was frequenting a spot where I could not get near him. When he made, in due time, his appearance at table, we found several grains of No. 3 quite inside his body, which seemed to have been there a



long time; yet he was in excellent condition. That was an unlucky bird, yet I pity more the poor fellow who lost him, and perhaps accused himself of having missed a fine shot. I have sometimes got birds (as a Pigeon, Golden Plover, or Dunlin Sandpiper), with only one leg; that is to say, they seemed to have lost one foot, or else were naturally deformed; but these were always in as good condition, and as fat, as their companions, who had the advantage of possessing a proper assortment of legs. The winter before last I caught a Gannet which had one leg diseased in a very curious way; it was swollen to more than double the natural size, and was full of dark-coloured blood. He swam in from the sea, and walked up on to the rocks, where he allowed himself to be taken without attempting to resist.

On Saturday I shot a pair of Teal upon a small loch in Iona, which reminded me of an adventure I had there a long time ago, and which I mention:—I had shot a nice little Drake Teal in the middle of the loch, which I was very desirous to get, as I wished to take a drawing of him; but having no dog, I stripped and went in after him. The water was not beyond my depth, but the bottom was very soft, oozy mud, which held one's feet as firmly as the stocks, while all around the water was filled with a tangled mass of aquatic plants, which closed about one's limbs like a strongly-woven net; and there I hung like a fly in a cobweb, floundering about like Milton's Satan in chaos. It was a very long time before I could extricate myself, and I was very nearly sticking there for good; however, I secured my bird, but resolved not to be without a dog in future, as such places are excessively dangerous.

The dog I have used since is a Skye terrier, a small bluish-grey one, which takes the water well; his feet are as webbed as those of an Otter, and his small size and his colour resembling that of the rocks, render him almost invisible—a great advantage when stalking or waiting for birds. Being accustomed to the boat, I find him sometimes useful; when he sees birds upon the water he makes a decided point, sometimes before



I can detect them, especially when rowing alone in a punt, when of course one's back is turned on everything that may be ahead.

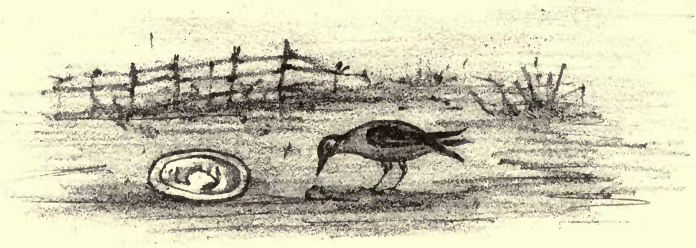
Another very necessary part of one's equipment is a glass of some kind. I formerly used a small telescope, but I have long given up carrying that, it being so cumbersome, and involving so much time, trouble, and the use of both hands every time it is looked through. A small single-barrelled opera-glass is far more

useful, as it may be fixed at the right focus, and so can be pulled out of the pocket, and used by the left hand alone, while the gun may still be retained in the other. A glass of this kind will of course not command such a long range as the telescope, but they are made of very considerable power, sufficient at least for most occasions. It is very useful for detecting birds upon the water, when one is boating, or for discovering them among rocks, or among reeds and cover; and by twilight it is superior to the telescope, as it contains fewer glasses, and does not consequently absorb so much of the light.

The Ravens have got their new nest in the locality I expected they were going to adopt. Here, in a high cliff, they have taken up their residence in an old nest formerly built by a Peregrine, but since tenanted by Hooded Crows. The nest being ready built, it only required a fresh lining. The place, I think, is totally inaccessible; however, I may sacrifice one of the old birds for the sake of its skin, should it be wanted.

I have got two more Black Guillemots' skins for you which exhibit the changes the plumage undergoes between winter and summer. The Wheatear arrived here on the 21st of March.

Last Saturday, the 3rd of April, I found a Rock Dove's nest containing young ones, which is unusually early.



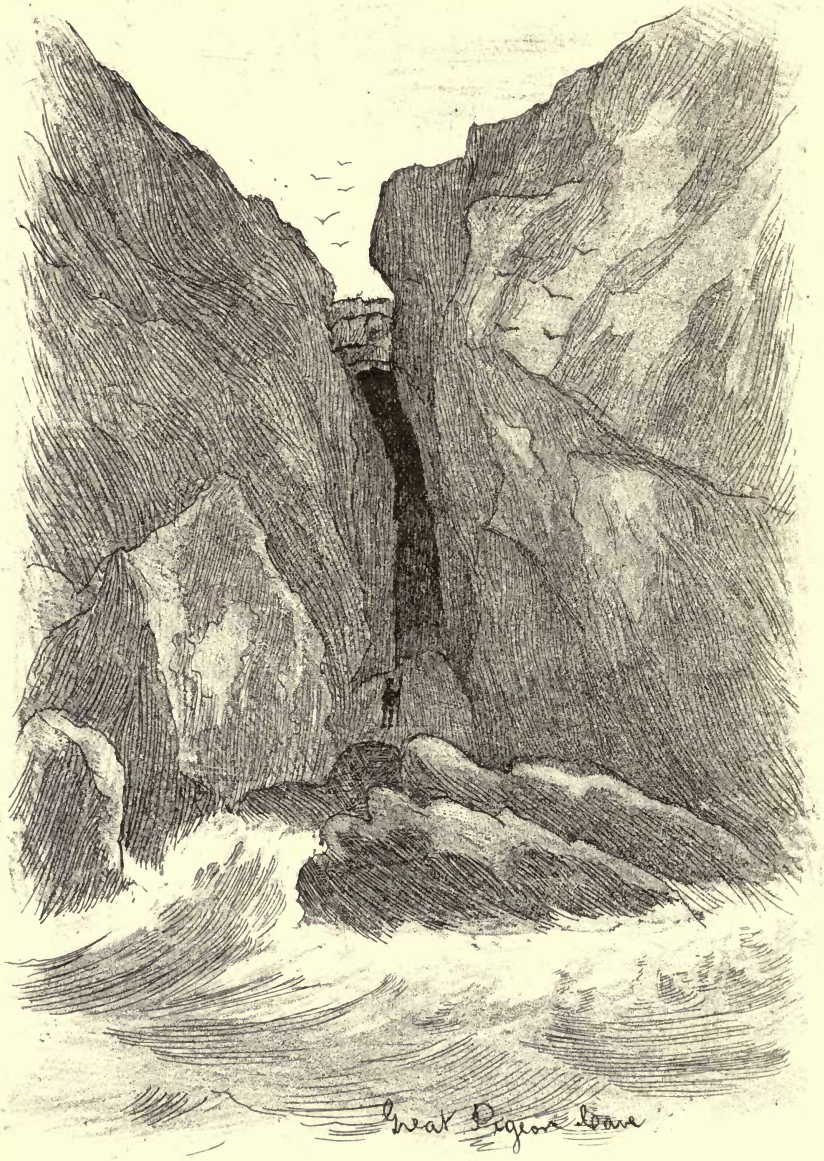
VIII.

IONA, 10*th April* 1852.

THE ROCK DOVE (*Columba livia*).

THE Wood Pigeon is unknown upon our rocky woodless shores, but its absence is compensated for by great numbers of a smaller species—the Rock Dove.

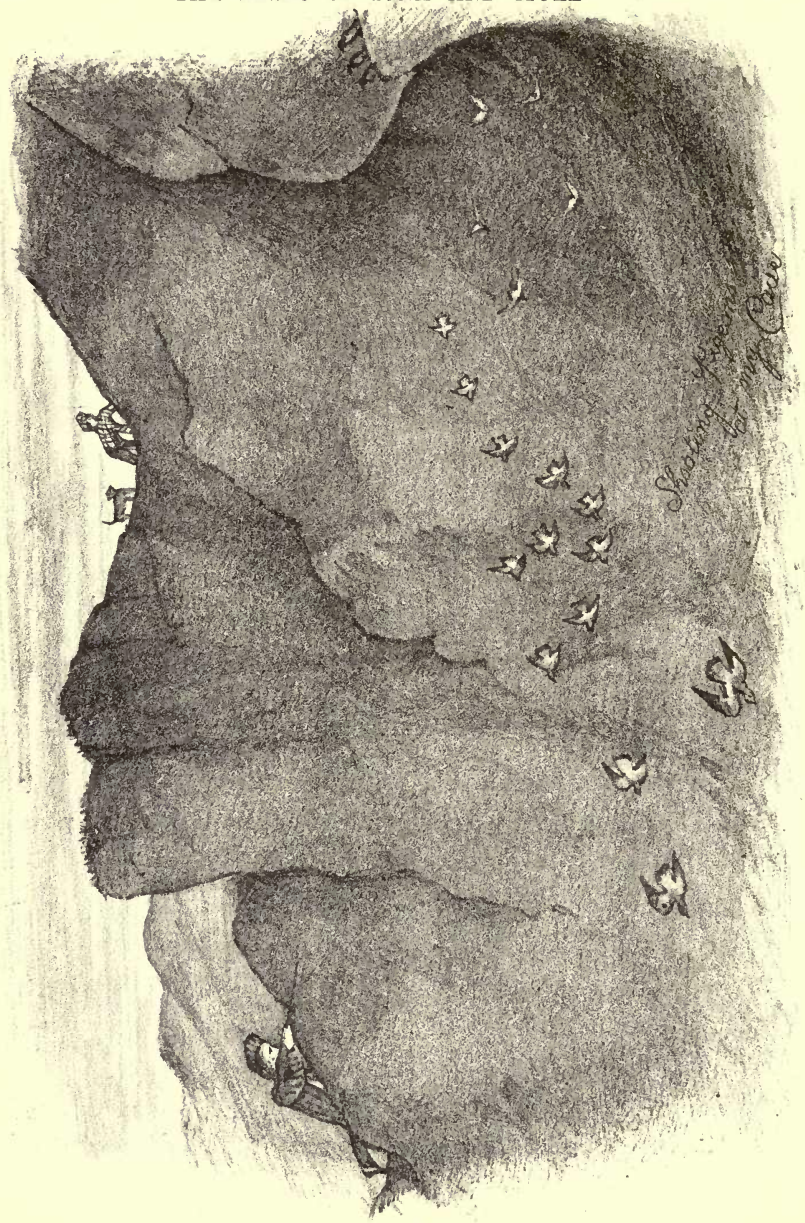
The granite cliffs on the south of Mull, the basaltic crags of Staffa, and lofty precipices of trap rock upon the adjacent islands, are all perforated by innumerable caverns of every imaginable size and shape, from the well-known majestic Hall of Fingal, resounding with the sullen booming of ever-rolling waves, down to the little fairy grotto, whose cool white shell-sand is scarce dimpled by the sparkling ripples of the sheltered sea. Some of these caves are grand and of lofty dimensions, with no floor but the deep blue water, which heaves to and fro through their huge frowning portals; others are romantic and picturesque, their rocks covered with many-coloured lichens, and their dark apertures fringed with shaggy heather and ivy, amongst which is browsing a wild mountain goat, with huge horns and beard. But many more of these caverns are horribly gloomy and forbidding—deep black dens extending far beyond the reach of the light of day, stretching into the very bowels of the adamantine cliff. The air smells dank and foul, and the walls are dripping with unwholesome slime. It is dangerous to explore them further without


Great Pigeon Cave

striking a light, as you may meet deep holes and black pools of water; and it is not unlikely but you may see the twinkling eyes of an Otter peeping out through the gloom. These caves generally have legends attached to them, such as of fugitive clansmen hiding from the pursuit of the avenger of blood, of wholesale deeds of murder, or of wild scenes of diablerie; and the names of the *Cave of Death*, the *Pit of Slaughter*, and the *Hobgoblin's Den* are often met with, and human bones actually are often discovered in them.

These haunts of bygone murderers, smugglers, and outlaws are now only tenanted by Doves, the emblems of innocence. They may be seen perpetually flitting in and out, some parties going off to feed, others returning to rest; a few birds sitting about the entrance, pluming themselves in the sunshine, or quietly dozing upon a sheltered ledge of rock. Upon a near approach, the cooing of the old birds may be heard, together with the querulous *peep-peeping* of the young demanding food, and the occasional stir of wings; but upon any alarm being given, the voices are immediately silenced, the clang and whir of wings reverberate from the profundity of the cave, and out pours a long stream of snowy bosoms and silver wings, which swiftly skim along the surface of the sea, and disappear round the next headland. In Iona alone (though but a small island) we have as many as nine or ten caves frequented by Pigeons, and in nearly every island of the Hebrides there is sure to be one cave called *par excellence* "Ua' Caloman," the Pigeon Cave.

I believe this Dove is only found upon the coast, though I am not aware what attraction the seashore has for it; certainly with us it

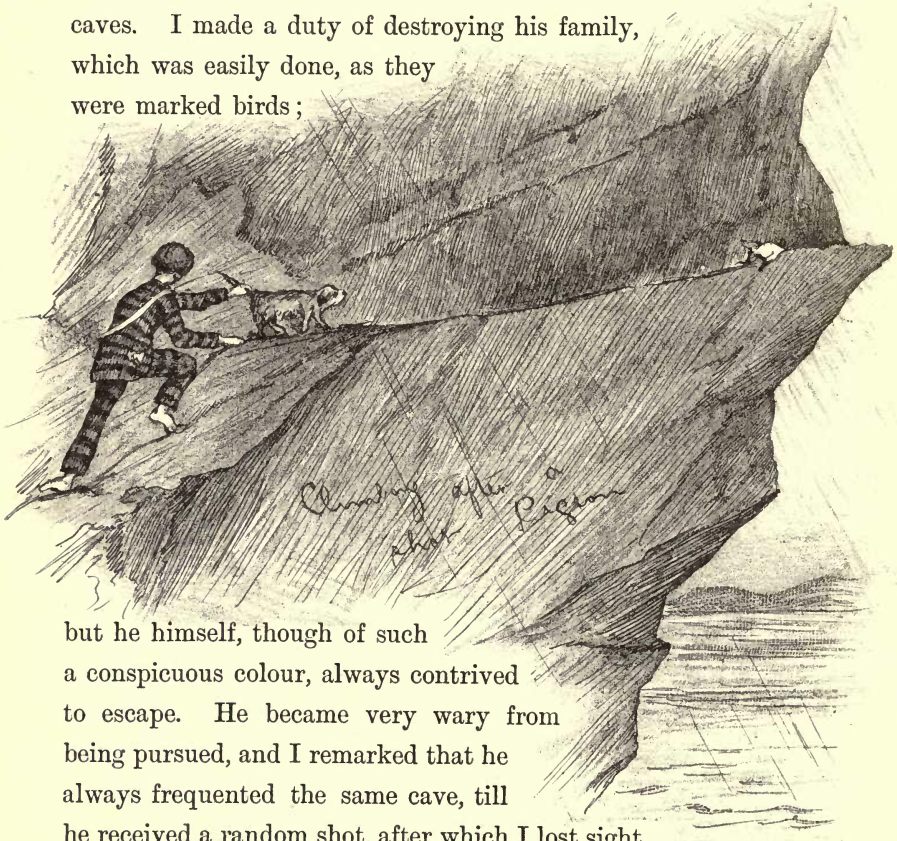


exclusively inhabits the sea-caves, and never goes far inland. In the winter I have once or twice seen them sitting upon the rocks at low-water, but I hardly think they were looking for food. They feed upon land snails—some small species which at certain times is found in considerable variety and vast abundance, spread over the low sandy pastures which skirt the sea.[1] The stubbles, the newly-sown fields, and the stackyards are their principal resorts for food, and their crops are invariably to be found well distended with grain, though in winter it is difficult to account for their getting such good supplies, after the stubbles are picked clean and the stackyards cleared. They must sometimes go great distances for their daily food; those which inhabit the small islands must of course always come to the mainland for their supply of grain—some a great distance. When a large flock is suddenly raised while feeding in a cornfield, after wheeling up in the air, it breaks up into smaller parties, which dart off in various directions for their homes—some across the seas, others to the nearer caves.

They seem to be migratory, to a certain extent in quest of food, at seedtime and harvest, if, as is often the case, the island crops are a little earlier than those on the mainland. Then our fields are covered with those petty plunderers, and at night the caves are filled with roosting birds, which remain about the island as long as food is very plentiful, and then decamp. I think, however, that individual birds are a good deal in the habit of

[1] See *Vertebrate Fauna of the Outer Hebrides*. D. Douglas, Edinburgh, 1888, p. 113. In other districts of greater agricultural merit, however, the Rock Doves constantly frequent the corn stubbles or barley stubbles of the interior, as at Tantallon, the coasts of Berwickshire, &c., and in the Orkneys.—Ed.

frequenting the same localities and roosting in the same cave until driven off by some cause. I have watched marked birds doing so; especially last summer, I was observing a large white male Pigeon, which had evidently escaped from the cot; he took to himself a little wild mate, and reared a brood in one of the caves. I made a duty of destroying his family, which was easily done, as they were marked birds;



but he himself, though of such a conspicuous colour, always contrived to escape. He became very wary from being pursued, and I remarked that he always frequented the same cave, till he received a random shot, after which I lost sight of him for a considerable time; but I found him at last, located upon the other side of the island, where he remained till his death.

The Rock Dove's nest is made up of small sticks or heather, or dried seaweed, and is lined with dried grass; the situation selected is any little ledge or cleft within the sheltering bosom of a rocky cavern. The eggs are two in number, generally producing male and female birds. The time for commencing their nesting seems rather variable; this year I found some young ones already hatched on the 2nd of April, while other pairs were only erecting their nests. They have several broods in the year, and their eggs may be found unhatched as late as September.

It is rather a timid bird if often shot at, but is by no means a shy or wary bird; in the fields the feeding flocks may often be openly approached, or the most bare-faced attempts at stalking

them will succeed. In the breeding season the hen will sit on the nest till approached, and never deserts it though often disturbed, and her nest and eggs handled. She does not always seek for inaccessible ledges to build her nest on, but takes any spot which offers, sometimes even the very floor of the cave.[1] If her eggs are taken out, she will probably replace them; and if her young are taken when half-fledged, she seems glad to get them so soon off her hands, and at once prepares for rearing her second brood.[2] The young birds instantly become quite tame and reconciled to hand feeding; indeed, as they grow up, their impertinent boldness becomes rather troublesome. They readily take to the dovecot, and pair with the tame Pigeons; even with fancy breeds, such as Fantails, &c. If a pair of real wild ones breed in confinement, their progeny at once show signs of diverging in colour from the natural uniform of their wild ancestry; the young birds are of a dark slate-colour in their first plumage, though they have the same markings as the adult birds. The male is recognised from his mate by a slight superiority of size, and more lustrous plumage.

In a gastronomic point of view these Pigeons are one of the most valuable kind of birds which frequent our coasts; they are nearly always fat and in good condition, are numerous and always to be procured; besides, being fed constantly upon our barley and oats, one can feel no compunction in levying a tribute upon them in return.

[1] This is different from *most* of our experience.—Ed.

[2] This appears as a new consideration for Members or Directors of the Association for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, who prosecute for taking young birds for scientific purposes.—Ed.

They are easiest shot while feeding abroad in the fields; at the caves a shout will cause them to fly out, but with such suddenness and swiftness that it requires something of a Battersea Pigeon-shooter's knack to succeed in hitting them quick enough. An indifferent shot (after knocking over one or two which may be incautiously napping on the outer ledges) had better conceal himself either in a cave or in a good position above it; in a short time a bird is sure to come darting swiftly for its accustomed haunts, but upon catching a glimpse of a lurking foe, he stops his rapid career, flutters his pinions for a moment, uncertain what to do; that momentary indecision is fatal—down he falls! while a roar as of a volcano bellows along the vaulted roof, and the cave is filled with wreaths of sulphurous smoke.

Writing from Iona I must not conclude without reminding you of the name of our patron saint, St Columba, the Dove that first brought to this land the olive branch of mercy.

IX.

IONA, 14*th April* 1852.

LAST Saturday (the 10th), being a very fine day, I and a young friend paid a visit to Soay to see what the feathered world was about. We did not meet with much life on our way; the winter birds have mostly left, and the summer ones have not yet arrived

in sufficient numbers to supply the vacancy; besides which the fine weather keeps them out at sea. We saw a string of Shearwaters (*Puffinus anglorum*), flying in a flock of about a dozen; this is their first appearance this year. We also saw a few Solan Geese (*Sula alba*), diving and plunging; their appearance here is a sign that they are on their way to their breeding stations. We were disappointed in our hope of finding Geese on the island, though they seem to have been very numerous there recently.

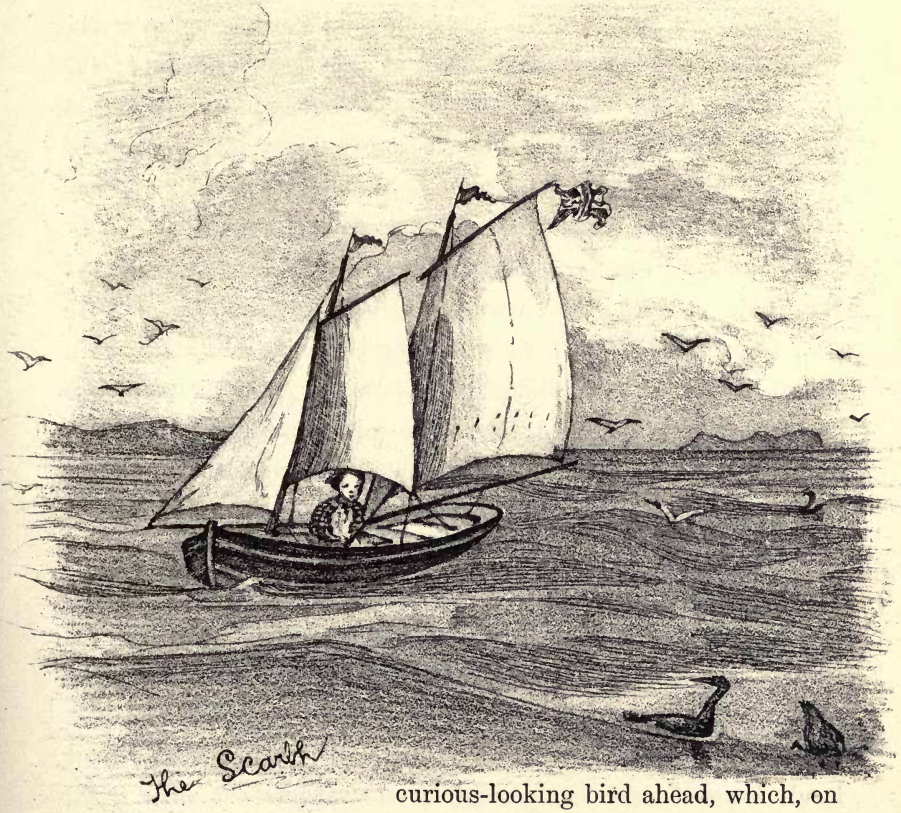
On exploring a cavern, from which we procured several broods of young Rock Doves (*Columba livia*) last year, we found, as we expected, a nest. The cave is of very great depth, but so narrow as scarcely to allow a person to reach the inner extremity. There we found the nest, made upon the ground, among the shingle, exteriorly formed of dry seaweed, and inside lined with sea-pink. It contained a pair of fresh eggs; there was a third lying outside the nest, which the birds seemed to have eaten;[1] it was empty, with only one small hole broken in it, so we took possession of the three eggs in your name.

While returning we met with several Black Guillemots (*Uria grylle*). I took a couple and found them to have completely assumed their summer plumage, though it has not yet acquired the brilliancy it possesses in the breeding season. I was about to shoot another which had rather a peculiar appearance, his body being quite black as in summer, while his head and neck retained a great deal of the grey; but there happened to be a pair of Eider Ducks (*Somateria mollissima*) at a short distance, and though we could not have got within shot of them, yet I did not wish to

[1] Or possibly eaten by a rat.—Ed.

disturb them, as I hope they may make their nest upon Soay, or one of the surrounding rocks.

As we were rowing along under the cliffs at the southern extremity of Iona we saw a



curious-looking bird ahead, which, on nearing, we recognised to be a Long-tailed Duck (*Harelda glacialis*). He was evidently a straggler, and very tame, allowing the boat to come almost within shot of him before taking wing. I

happened to have a cartridge in the gun, which I sent after him, and happily bowled him over. It is an adult male, acquiring his summer plumage, which gives him a curious mottled appearance. I have kept his skin in the same manner as the last, and it will be interesting to compare it with the full winter dress. The black spot on the neck is expanding and spreading over the whole neck and breast, till it meets at the black portion of the body. The white shoulder patch and long scapulars have disappeared, and are replaced by shorter red and black feathers. The only part which is imperfect is the tail; the long feathers have been cast, and the summer tail has not yet replaced them.

Of course it was too early to look for Petrels yet; so this was the whole produce of our voyage, unless I add the lid of some poor sailor's chest, which we picked up as it was drifting in from the ocean. It bore an almost illegible name, Peter B——, much overgrown with barnacles; but there were marks, slightly burnt, as if from a pipe having been frequently knocked out on them, which I much fear was finally extinguished in the salt-water waves, along with its owner.

The Choughs have been for some days back busily engaged carrying wool into their cave, and the last time I passed near them the pair attacked me furiously, alighting within twenty yards, scolding with all their might; their wings, half-expanded, quivering with wrathful emotion, their bills wide open, and their heads lowered near the ground, as they threw out their shrill ear-piercing screams.

X.

LORN, 1*st May* 1852.

IT is possible that I shall leave this note with my own hands at your address in Glasgow, accompanied by a small box containing a pair of Red-legged Crows, one skinned and the other simply disembowelled and embalmed in the style of an Egyptian mummy. They are remarkably small specimens, and I do not think they were nesting, as I watched them for several days; however, they are male and female.

My own particular friends, as I mentioned in my last letter, had completed their labours of nidification, and I supposed that they would immediately commence laying and hatching; but I was much concerned to see them very rarely near their nest, and I picked up some wool (apparently the lining of the nest) upon the floor of the cave. Determined to examine it, I contrived to hoist myself up to the spot with the assistance of a boat's anchor and cable. The nest, beautifully woven of heather sprigs, was unlined and empty. I cannot account for this misfortune; however, the old birds still haunt the vicinity of the cave, and furiously resent any intrusion near it; and possibly they may make another attempt at nesting this year.

I also send you a few Hooded Crow's eggs; these were replaced by a pair of Bantam's eggs daubed with indigo, only one Crow's egg being left. In due time the little Hoody made his

appearance, and two days after the young Bantams saw the light. The old Crow nursed the two little chickens with the same tenderness that she showed towards her own little savage imp; there they were, like Romulus and Remus,

in the bosom of their rugged foster-mother. We carried them away, however, from the ogre's castle, fearing that they might some day remark, "What a great beak you have got, grandmamma!"

I intend visiting London, and shall not return to Iona till the

end of June, and consequently I shall be absent the best part of the egg season.

I shall conclude with a few notes of the month:—

May 1*st.*—Considerable flocks of Whimbrels arrived. I killed three couple with great ease, and found them in very good condition, which may be taken as a proof that their last stage was not a very long or harassing one. These birds continue very numerous during the whole of May, but as soon as June commences they disappear as suddenly as they arrived. Iona is not one of their halting-places on their return south, for we are not visited by them in autumn, except by an occasional straggler.

May 12*th.*—The Terns and Corncrakes arrived. Their appearance is so precisely punctual to the day, that I would as soon date by it as I would by the almanac. The Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) is with us far more common than the Lesser Black-backed Gull (*L. fuscus*), except at this time of the year, when great numbers of the latter are seen in all the newly-sown fields, busily eating the corn among flocks of wild Pigeons and trespassing poultry. They are at such times extremely wary, and indeed at all times they appear to be much more so than the Grey Gulls.

I shall now drop anchor, as I have been out all night in an open boat—a two-masted skiff, with three reefs in the mainsail, battling against a heavy sea and head wind blowing very hard. I landed at five in the morning, well drenched with rain and spray.

XI

IONA, 20*th September* 1852.

I REGRET very much that I have entirely lost this season, so far as ornithological pursuits are concerned, owing to my absence during the most interesting time—namely, while the birds were nesting. It is a useless occupation lamenting over lost opportunities, but I must mention one or two.

A pair of Eider Ducks and a pair of Shieldrakes have successfully reared their broods upon Soay Island, and have gone off with their families unmolested. Another Shieldrake's nest was discovered upon one of the Treshnish Isles by a youth connected with the fishery, and while he was handling the eggs he observed another hole at the back of the Shieldrake's nest, and discovered within it a Shearwater (*Puffinus anglorum*) sitting upon her egg. I lost all these owing to my not being at home.

On the 6th of this month, when on a visit to Staffa, we shot a number of Guillemots and Razor-bills; they were mostly birds of the year, and among them was one young Bridled Guillemot (*Uria lachrymans*); though in immature plumage, the white line round the eye was quite distinctly marked, but the bird was too much injured to be preserved. We took away a pair of young Rock Doves (*Columba livia*) from Soay, intending to rear them by hand, as we have often done before; but it happened that a pair of tame Pigeons had just had their young taken by a cat, and of their

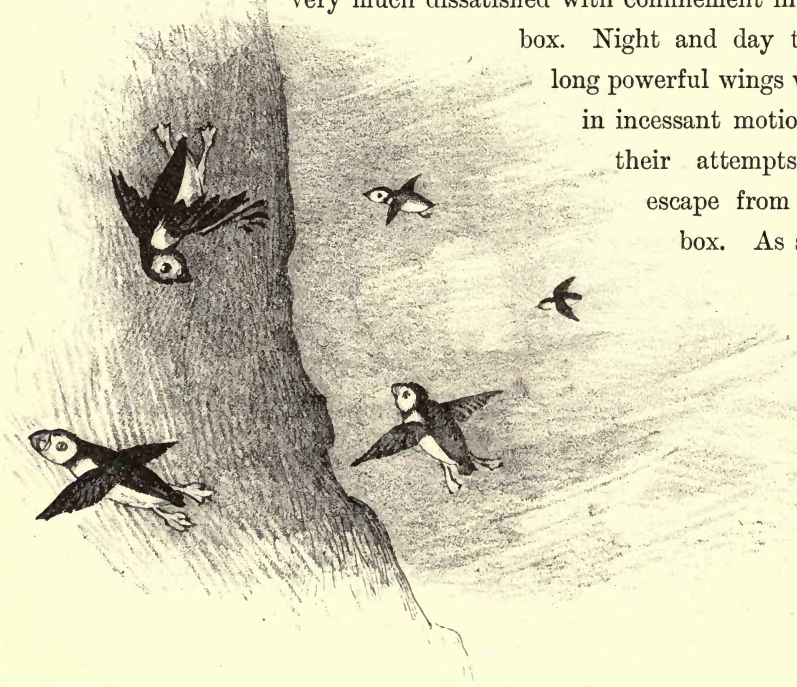
own accord the bereaved parents immediately took to the two orphans, and brought them up.

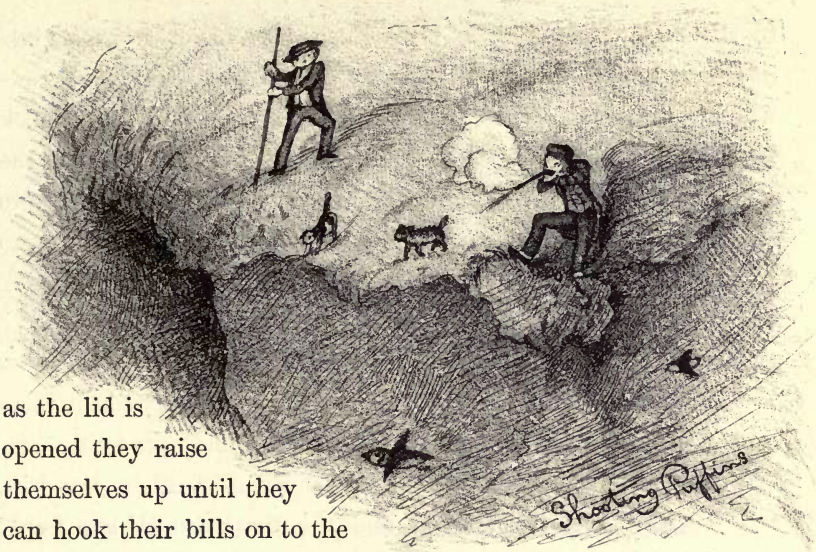
By the last post I forwarded a pair of young Petrels (*Thalassidroma pelagica*); they were taken from Soay on the 8th, and were then about a fortnight old, but very

little advanced, being covered with a profusion of down, and their legs and wings quite useless. The old birds were all absent; though we searched every hole, and dug one hole out to ascertain that they were not skulking at the extremity of their burrows, we did not succeed in finding one. The two young captives were placed in a little box, and fed with

very small bits of fish, crammed down on the end of a little stick; they took their food in this manner with great reluctance, but I soon discovered that they had a great partiality for cod-liver oil, and would suck a stick dipped in oil very willingly, clattering their beaks and shaking their heads with evident satisfaction. I should conclude from this that the Petrels feed their young with the oil, which they have the power of ejecting from their bills.

The young birds made very rapid progress, and soon became tired of confinement, and were only pleased when allowed to walk about upon the table, though they could not rise off their knees. During the last few days that I had them they became quite fledged, though still retaining a great deal of wool upon their bodies; and they also became exceedingly active and restless, and very much dissatisfied with confinement in the box. Night and day their long powerful wings were in incessant motion in their attempts to escape from the box. As soon



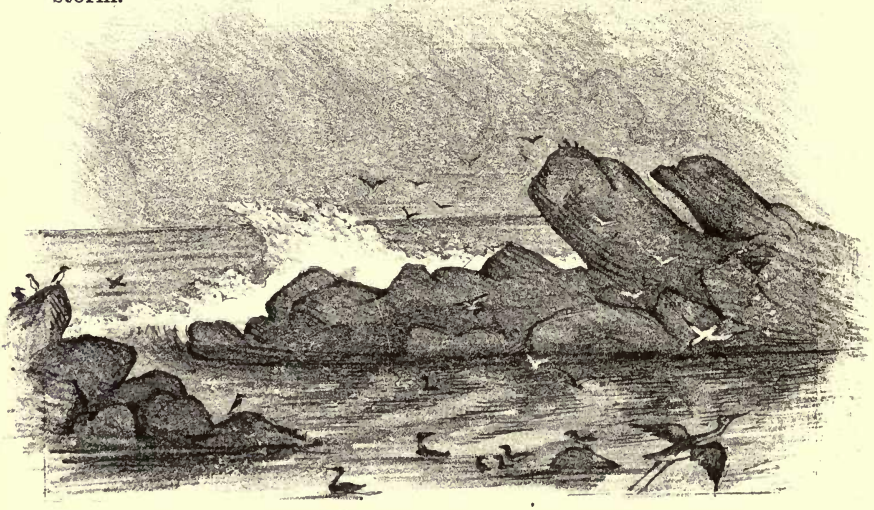


as the lid is opened they raise themselves up until they can hook their bills on to the edge; and then, assisted by their wings and scrambling with their claws, they hoist themselves up. When upon the top of the box, they would be satisfied for a little while, shake themselves, and dress their feathers. The instinctive love of motion, however, would soon return, and they go off on a voyage of discovery.

They walk with great caution, keeping their heads down, and using their bills as walking-sticks, hooking hold of any inequality to assist themselves along, and keeping themselves up, for they have a constant tendency to topple over on their faces: they also are of great service to feel their way, for their sight seemed very imperfect, and their eyes were generally closed. When informed by the bill that they are arrived at the edge of the table, the closed eyes open, and an anxious survey is taken of the depth below; and after considerable preparation and thought, the hazardous leap is taken, and a short flight performed in safety

to the floor. These little birds seemed to have an irresistible instinct which led them to attempt to surmount every obstacle which fell in their way. When walking on the table every book and desk must be climbed by means of the hooked bill, with the assistance of claws and pinions. In an angle they would try to shuffle up with their elbows as chimney-sweeps used to climb up chimneys; and when upon the floor I have noticed them striving for a considerable time to ascend the wall of the room.

On the whole they were very amusing and interesting pets, and I hoped to have reared them, but they were very sensitive to cold. One morning I found them both stiff and apparently lifeless, but the fire recovered them. Last Saturday night, however, was a wintry night; it hailed, and the north wind blew hard; the high hills were covered with snow, and the spirits of the Stormy Petrels departed amidst the roaring of the equinoctial storm.



XII.

IONA, 26*th October* 1852.

I WAS disappointed to hear of the Petrels arriving in such bad condition, as I hoped that the post would have taken them quickly enough to prevent their being spoiled. I got another young one from the burrows on the 18th of this month at Soay Island. It is quite free of down in the upper parts, but underneath he still retains a considerable amount, giving him the appearance of a bird sitting in a nest of wool. The pale bar across the wing is very distinctly marked. He is very active, and can fly perfectly well. At night his wings are in perpetual motion during his endeavours to escape from the box in which he is confined—so much so that he spoils the appearance of his quill feathers and tail very much; and so I want to send him off as soon as possible, though I should like to keep him till he is quite free of down. I give him a good deal of liberty, allowing him to ramble about the table the whole evening, the favourite time of activity. His habits are similar to those of the pair I last described, except

that he is stronger, and capable of more extended flights. When let out of his box he performs a curious exercise—putting his wings into such rapid motion that they cease to be discernible; and although he does not rise into the air, yet he becomes so buoyant that his feet retain no hold of the slippery surface of the table, so that he goes sliding about, backwards and forwards, and round and round, in a very ludicrous manner. This comical minuet generally terminates by his incautiously approaching the edge of the table, and disappearing suddenly backwards.

If you take him up in your hand he always runs up your arm with great swiftness, fanning with his wings till he attains your shoulder or head; this is in accordance with his instinctive propensity to scramble up every obstacle he meets, and never to rest until he has attained the highest elevation within his reach; when this is done he rests contented for a short time, and then throws himself off into the air. I have fed this one almost exclusively on cod-liver oil, which it takes off the end of a feather. His ordinary position when at rest is kneeling down, the tail half-expanded, and the wings very much crossed over the back. He generally shuffles about upon his knees, and cannot easily retain his position erect upon his feet without the assistance of his wings.

I envy you very much the fine engravings that you are procuring. I prefer a really good accurate portrait of a bird to the finest mounted specimen, and a collection of the first has such great advantages of portability and durability that I would sooner possess it than a collection of real specimens. However, this is a matter of taste, and depends very much whether one remains in a

permanent house or not. For my part, I do not intend finally to set up my staff until I have trudged about a little while longer.

As to the quadrupeds of Iona, the list is so short that they are scarcely worthy of much notice.

The Common Shrew (*Sorex araneus*[1]) is found, though not numerous. I was going to say that Bats never were seen in Iona, but I recollect on one single occasion, while waiting at a Pigeon cave, after dusk, seeing a solitary Bat flitting about the mouth of it. This is the only one I ever saw either in Iona or in the adjoining part of Mull, though there are numberless dark caves round these shores. They are very abundant on the mainland of Argyllshire, in the district called Lorn, opposite to the Island of Mull.

The Stoat (*Mustela erminea*) is very common throughout the island, living in dry stone dykes, or holes under rocks. In one of these dens, after killing its inmate, I took out the nest which the little animal had made, consisting of dry grass and seaweed; there was also a good collection of small birds' feathers, and four or five wings of Ringed Dotterels. These must have been caught when sleeping on the shore. I have frequently seen the tracks of the Ermine over the wet sand at low-water. I am not aware whether or not it is common for these animals to take to the water; but I had the following anecdote from a humble friend, who, I believe, could not misrepresent a fact, though he were to try:—He saw a Stoat watching a flock of young Ducklings

[1] More correctly *Sorex minutus*, which alone occurs in the islands, to the exclusion of the larger species, which is found on the mainland. Or if the larger species ever occurs upon the islands, it must be looked upon as the result of accidental or intentional introduction only.—Ed.

swimming in a pool, and after some hesitation he plunged in, and swimming unperceived among them, caught one and brought it ashore. My friend, the owner of the Ducks, now rushed forward to resent the liberties taken with his property, not in time to save the poor Duckling though, as its throat was cut. Accordingly he threw it in the midden in front of the door (the usual locality of the dung-heap in the Highlands); the robber having taken refuge among the stones of a dyke. In a short time he was surprised to see the defunct Duckling moving away, the persevering little quadruped having watched what was done with his prize, and actually returned to appropriate it.

The only quadrupeds remaining to be mentioned are the Common Rabbit, the Long-tailed Field Mouse, the Otter, and the Seal. As for the last-named, they are so shy and so rarely to be seen that one can scarcely make any observation upon their habits.[1]

I must conclude rather abruptly, as the postman will begin to indulge in profane expressions, as he is waiting at my elbow.

XIII.

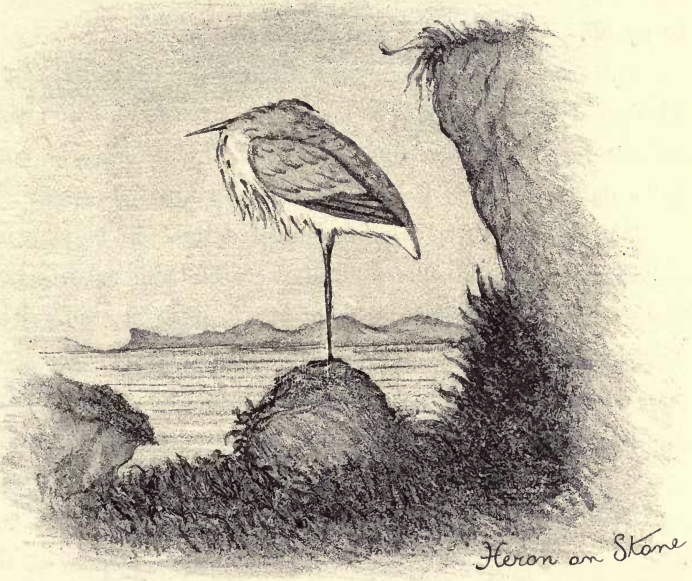
IONA, 22*nd November* 1852.

I HAVE never seen the Little Auk (*Mergulus melanoleucos*), so I suppose it is a frequenter more of the East than of the West Coast.[2] If it ever came near us here, I could not have failed to have seen or heard of it.

[1] For further observations on the Seal, see Letter XXIII.

[2] Or rather, perhaps, a frequenter more of the open sea than of the land-locked firths and straits.—ED.

The Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) is very abundant in winter. They are very picturesque birds and form a great addition to a landscape. They roost, when the tide is full, upon some unfrequented rocks, where I have sometimes caught them napping. They have a very grotesque appearance then; a muffled up ball of feathers stuck upon the end of a single long stick; the head, one



leg, and the bill all put almost entirely out of sight, the bare extremity of the latter alone protruding from among the long breast feathers.

Last spring I happened to meet with a Heron among the rocks at low-water, which had apparently received some hurt, as he flew off with difficulty and alighted again at a short distance. When I followed him I saw him gradually sink down into a

sitting posture; on my nearer approach his neck was also slowly lowered down, till it lay along the seaweed. As it was a low, hollow rock on which he lay, he thus rendered himself almost invisible, and would certainly never have been noticed by any one who had not kept his eye steadily fixed on the place. When, however, I came quite close up to him and he saw that he had not escaped detection, he sprang up and made a successful effort to fly off.

A Heron may be eaten cold when it has been sufficiently kept. Though it is not so good as many other sea fowl, I do not see why we should be more fastidious than our forefathers, who considered it "a dainty enough dish to set before a king."

The larger Gulls take a special delight in tormenting their sedate grey friend whenever they catch him soberly traversing the air, going or returning from his feeding ground. The Gulls with hoarse cries make repeated swoops, which, frightening the poor Heron out of his propriety, makes him quickly change the dignified measured flappings of his great wings for a series of uncouth somersaults through the air, by which he tries to escape their rude attack, at the same time furiously uttering his harsh screams, by which (could we understand the bird language) he probably threatens his assailants with "police prosecution and all the terrors of

the law!" This continues till the Heron alights or is driven far inland, or till the Gulls get tired of the sport.[1]

I am very sorry to hear of the fate of the Cormorant's egg. I put it into too frail a box, and the stamping in the post office must have broken it. I have forwarded another by a private hand, but it is not such a fine specimen, as it has been a little scraped. The natural colour of the Cormorant's egg seems to be a sea-green, but they have a rough coating of a dirty white substance. This was very remarkable upon the egg I sent you first. I shot the hen and then took the egg, which was the only one in the nest. Upon dissecting the bird, I found another egg just ready for laying of a beautiful pure green colour, with no white stains on it.

[1] Edward, the Aberdeenshire naturalist, gives an animated description of a successful attack by a Carrion Crow and two Hoodies upon a Heron, for the purpose of making him disgorge the food he was taking to his family (*Life of a Scotch Naturalist*, Chap. XIII. p. 272). Perhaps the Gulls also attack him with the object of plunder. What with the fear of highway robbers by land and pirates by sea, it must be a difficult matter for the poor Heron to know which way to take.—H. D. G.

I tried the edible qualities of a Cormorant's egg, the white of which (excuse the "bull") was of a pale emerald-green, and on the whole I should not recommend it as a delicacy.

I am not so well acquainted with the Black Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) as with the green (*P. graculus*), but I have frequently seen it in the summer with the white patches fully developed, and I never observed any to possess crests, though the feathers on the top of the head are very much elongated. In the Green Cormorant the crest is a most conspicuous ornament, visible at a great distance, consisting of several hackle-like feathers two or three inches long, gracefully curving forward. It is generally only possessed by the fully matured birds during the breeding season, but even then many birds that are nesting are without it; while, on the other hand, I have sometimes seen the crest quite developed in winter. At this moment I have a fine skin with a beautiful crest of one which was shot in March.

I forgot, when mentioning our quadrupeds, to notice the fact of a supposed Greenland Seal having been seen in Loch Scridean, a long arm of the sea near here. It was in spring that it was there, and it was several times seen lying upon a rock surrounded by the sea. A gentleman, who resides in the neighbourhood, offered a reward of five pounds for its capture, which unfortunately was not effected.

A few days ago I took a little punt up to a large fresh-water loch, where I had an opportunity of watching some Grebes. The air was perfectly still, and the surface of the water was like a sheet of glass. When at a distance from one another the Grebes called to one another until they met. This cry was a

kind of "Creek! creek! creek!" We chased several, which escaped just as we made sure of their capture, by disappearing and appearing no more. One went into a bed of reeds, through which we forced the boat, and succeeded in frightening him out into the clear water, but when the boat had got within forty yards of him, he rose upon the wing with great ease and flew clean off to the other end of the loch.

XIV.

IONA, 23*rd November* 1852.

THE BLACK GUILLEMOT (*Uria grylle*).

THIS is a constant resident around our coasts; in every boating excursion it may be frequently met with, both in summer and winter. Perhaps they are rather more numerous in summer, for then small flocks are to be found clustering around all the more unfrequented islets, which are haunted by them for the purpose of incubation. Here during the breeding season they may be seen in full activity, diving in pursuit of small fry, and flitting to and fro between their nests and the surface of the water, while others sit erect, ranged along the rocks overhanging the sea, gasping out a plaintive wheezing noise, something like the complainings of a set of very young kittens. This seems to be their only cry, for, except at this time of year, they are entirely mute.

The nests are concealed in all manner of out-of-the-way holes, under large detached rocks, in deep crevices, or in small caves.

In general the nest is so far in as to be beyond reach, after the place of its concealment has been discovered, except with the assistance of a boat-hook or something similar. I have never found the number of eggs to exceed two, which have some resemblance in colour and marking to some of the smaller Gulls' eggs; but there is a characteristic peculiarity about their appearance which easily distinguishes them from those.

The young are covered with brownish-black down. They will greedily take bits of fish from the hand soon after their capture, and may easily be reared.

The plumage of the old birds at this time of the year is black with a greenish gloss, or rather a perfect bottle-green, beautifully relieved by the pure white patch upon the wing, and further enlivened by the brilliantly red feet. The inside of the mouth is also of a very rich tint of orange. The birds are not all equally beautiful. Some, probably the hens and younger males, are of a dull brownish-black, and the white patch on the wing is obscured.

In winter their appearance is totally changed. They are then to be seen about the coast a little way out at sea, but seldom coming very near to land. The variety of plumage to be observed among different individuals is very great, for scarcely two are to be seen exactly similar. In the depth of winter the whitest ones are to be got. These are entirely pure white, except the wings, which remain black as in summer, and a small portion of grey upon the back connecting them. When seen under this aspect the appellation of Greenland Dove is much more appropriate than that of Black Guillemot. But it is only a few that acquire this degree of purity. The upper parts are generally more or less

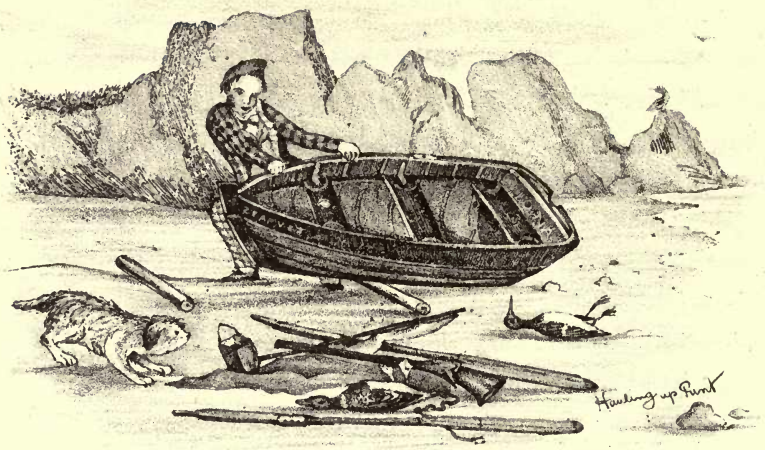
marked with grey, or sometimes black, while the under parts are mottled with black and white. Some even retain their black plumage entirely.[1] The young birds are blackish-brown above and white underneath. The upper plumage turns to grey as winter comes on; the white patch on the wing is very much clouded with black spots, and the legs are of a dull brownish-red.

This Guillemot is a very tame bird and easily shot, as it allows a boat to approach very near before it takes flight. They seldom attempt to escape by diving, or, if they do, they probably rise again within shot. They do not rise very easily off the water, and their feet often come in contact with the crest of a wave just as they are rising, when, in spite of all their hurry, the round, plump little fellows are fairly tripped up, and down they come souse into the water again head foremost.

The Black Guillemot sits on the shore in an erect position; but on the floor of a room they do not seem able to walk at all, for while the Common Guillemot stumps about with great activity and ease, the other crawls about upon his stomach, pushing himself along with his legs and wings without trying to stand up.

I may conclude by remarking that the flesh of the Black Guillemot is much superior to that of the Common Guillemot and Razor-bill.

[1] We have notes showing that in some other parts of the Northern Isles the adult Black Guillemots invariably retain the black plumage in winter.—Ed.



XV.

IONA, 1*st December* 1852.

IMMEDIATELY after I had despatched my last letter to you I went out for a short sail and saw several Black Guillemots in various states of plumage. I shot the whitest, and on examination it reminded me of what I had forgotten to remark—namely, that the tail of this Guillemot, like its wings, does not change colour in winter, but remains black. This is only the case with the tail feathers, for the upper and under coverts change colour, getting tipped with grey or becoming actually white.

I also killed a Great Northern Diver (*Colymbus glacialis*) weighing between eleven and twelve pounds. The day was very calm and the water perfectly smooth. My companion and I

observed a pair of these birds swimming together about two hundred yards from us, and from two fishing-boats at the same time, rowing up towards them from the opposite direction. He accordingly lay quite still. The Divers let the fishing-boat come within about eighty yards of them and dived with their heads towards us. Then followed a few seconds of keen excitement, and the monsters emerged thirty yards the other side of us, having passed underneath our boat. One dived again the moment it got its head above water, but the other seemed to be slowly sinking down in a very curious manner, so that there was nothing appearing but his head when I fired. The splash caused by the shot subsided and there floated his huge bulk.

We saw several more Great Northern and Black-throated Divers during this short sail, but had not time to go after them. They say that the appearance of these birds prognosticates bad weather. At any rate, it blew a hurricane that night and the next two days.

As a friend was about going to Glasgow and the weather was cold, I meant to have sent this Diver to you in the flesh; but after keeping it safe for some days, a dog got access to it and bit off its head. I console myself with the thought that it would not have kept, as my friend would be a long time on the road. The head was a great size, nearly as large as the Black Guillemot's whole body. He was in poor condition and changing his plumage. The wings are still spangled with white stars; but on the back the plumage is mostly greyish-black, though a good many of the black feathers, with the double white spot at the extremity, still remain. It is worthy of notice, as showing the manner in

which they lose these handsome ornaments, that, as one of us was stroking his hand along the back of the bird, we observed several of these white spots drop off like flakes from the feathers of which they formed a part. It was this peculiarity that made me wish to forward this specimen, and I think I will yet preserve the skin of what remains.

XVI.

IONA, 17*th December* 1852.

I WILL begin by wishing you a merry Christmas and many happy returns of this jovial season. Then I will go on to answer one or two of the inquiries which you made in your last letters, hitherto neglected by me.

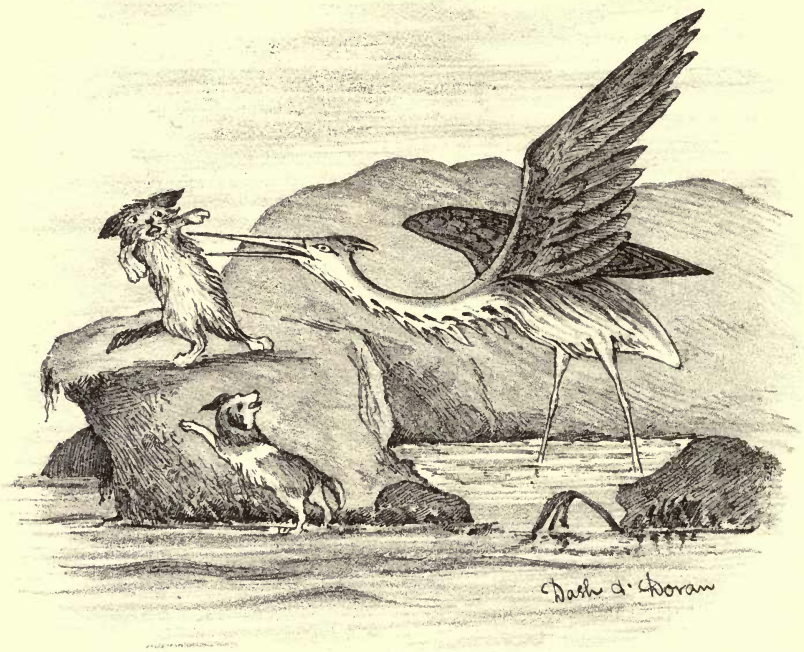
I have made very little progress in my observations as to the Bridled Guillemot. I only discovered it here last year in the spring, at which time I obtained two specimens. This summer I was very little in the way of looking after any birds at all; however, in autumn I shot "a this year's bird," in which the white mark about the eye was distinctly marked. On every one of these occasions they were procured along with a lot of Common Guillemots, from which it was impossible to distinguish them till actually taken into the boat. On procuring the first one, being anxious to record the fact of its having been captured on

these coasts, we sent the head to Mr Fenton, a bird-stuffer in Edinburgh. The answer he returned contained a brief note from Mr Selby, pronouncing it as "that unfrequent bird the Bridled Guillemot."

You recollect alluding to the disappearance of the young birds from the localities where the breeding goes on, especially

upon the East Coast, where it is remarked that so few of the immature birds remain. This does not seem to be the case on our shores. Here the proportion of immature birds is very much what you would expect it to be. One thing is to be observed, however, that the young birds are infinitely more easy of approach than the old ones, whose cunning and suspicion increase in proportion to their maturity and beauty of plumage. As from a

gastronomic point of view the young ones are preferable to the old, and as they are so much more easily procured, he who shoots for the "pot," without any regard for the skins, will always have a very large proportion of the young birds among his game. The



young ones, therefore, obtrude themselves so much more upon one's notice than the fine old full-dressed ones, that (here at least) one would be led to suppose that their number preponderated.

In autumn, when the Curlews and Herons return from their

breeding stations, the juveniles fall an easy prey owing to the confiding simplicity of their youth. These, of course, are easily distinguished by their smaller size and dull plumage. The same is the case with other birds which breed upon the spot, such as Sea-pyets, Pigeons, Gulls, Scarts, &c. In winter the number of Gulls in their dark-brown plumage is decidedly much greater than that of the old white ones. This applies to the small and large species. It is very remarkable in the case of Gulls how much less sensible of danger these immature birds are than the elders of the flocks; the latter will not generally allow themselves to be approached openly without taking wing, and in their flight they usually alter their course to avoid danger; but the younger members are quite heedless of danger. The Herring Gull is the commonest of the larger birds, though the Black Backs are numerous too. Nearly all the Cormorants that are killed during the winter are birds of the year; but this letter is too near its conclusion to begin to treat of Scarts, so I will leave them till another opportunity.

XVII.

IONA, 27*th January* 1853.

FOR many weeks the weather has been so boisterous and wet as to be very unfavourable for out-of-door recreations of any kind, shooting among the rest. These very violent gales sweep away the birds from our island to the better shelter afforded by the mainland; consequently I find game very scarce at present. The continual open soft weather and absence of frost is still more unfavourable, and the Ducks, Geese, Plover, &c., seem little inclined to direct annual pilgrimages towards Columba's sacred shores.

Some of the late gales have been exceedingly grand. The dreadful fury of the wind is not to be described. The sea, running mountains high, threatens to overwhelm the island with its roaring breakers. The very granite cliffs seem to tremble under the ponderous strokes of these liquid mountains, as they come rolling on, crashing into foam, and yeast, and hissing spray with hideous din, filling the air with thick salt vapour, which, caught up by the blast, is borne away far inland in dense wreathing columns, like the smoke from a battlefield. This is truly the war of elements. Ocean, contending for dominion over *terra firma*, pours forth, rank upon rank, its innumerable host of high-bounding white-maned chargers. See the turmoil, the furious strife, the maddening confusion! Hear the hoarse shoutings of the leaders! The hurricane sounds on the charge. The hail pours down its

rattling volleys of icy shafts. Heaven waves its sable banners overhead, and lets loose its dread artillery. The island shakes. Its deep-rooted bastions of adamant tremble at the shock of the fierce assaults of the raging billows; but in vain. Thus far shalt thou come and no farthur, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed. And beaten, broken, dashed in pieces, and churned into foam, they successively roll murmuring back submissive to the eternal decree.

Iona in winter is very favourable for those who love to see nature in its sublime moods. A storm in a peopled district is not seen to such advantage. Shattered chimney-pots, swinging shutters, inverted umbrellas, &c., are not picturesque subjects. The bleak storm-swept hill, the naked granite rock, and stunted heather tufts are in keeping with the fury of the storm, which roars and bellows over its undisputed dominions. The first is like an over-driven ox creating a clatter in a china shop. The latter is like the lord of the herd careering over his native plains. There are not even trees in these islands, and therefore, as Dr Johnson remarks, "all the noise of the storm is entirely its own."

The Black and the White Puffins that you mentioned as being at the museum are a most astounding phenomenon. I have never seen any peculiarly coloured bird, except a Rock Pipit, which I picked up dead on a small island. It was nearly white or cream-coloured. Our talented proprietor, the Duke of Argyll, who is also an ornithologist, saw it when visiting the island, and at once mistook it for a Canary bird.

The Woodcock is not numerous here, on account of the want of proper cover; but it breeds on the opposite coast of Mull.

At the beginning of the winter we had a great number of Fieldfares about the hilly sheep pastures. This is quite an unusual bird here. I never saw it here before. Is the Fieldfare known to breed in this country?

Shelter from a Squall

Last spring a youthful companion of mine was visiting some friends a few miles from here, and was invited to look at a nest in the garden belonging to an unknown bird. He went, and at once recognised a pair of Fieldfares. I examined and cross-questioned my young friend on the

subject, and I cannot help feeling satisfied that he was not mistaken, as he is well acquainted with all our birds, possesses the visual powers of the hawk tribe, and is a disciple whose development of the sporting faculties bids fair to surpass those of his patron.

I am obliged to E. K. B. for his corroboration of my statements concerning the friendly terms on which the Choughs live with the Jackdaws, and in return bear full witness to the truth and correctness of his description of the grief of the survivor when one of a pair of Choughs is killed. Three times I have had occasion to shoot at a Chough, and each time I was obliged to shoot at its mate also, partly out of pity for her grief and also because I felt rather ashamed of myself, as she kept close to me, filling the air with her noisy lamentations and execrations of my cruelty, impelling me to repeat the deed of blood. If it has been observed sometimes that the Chough disappears at the same time as the Jackdaw begins to increase in numbers, may not this be owing to some change in the character of the locality, such as extensive agricultural operations and increased population, which may have the effect of disgusting one bird while it attracts the other? Thus, I certainly am of opinion that free trade and opening the ports has brought the Rooks to Iona! Why, what connection is there between political questions and ornithology? Rooks indeed! Why, free trade, &c., only affects the farmers, not the "parsons." Well, I'll tell you. Since the ports were opened to the importation of foreign cattle, the rearing of black cattle has been almost abandoned in these parts of the Highlands; consequently sheep have taken their place, and in

Iona, where two years ago you would hardly find a sheep, now you will see scores of them; and when, two years ago, not a Rook ever came to the island, now the hill pastures are black with them.

Possibly the Jackdaws may steal the Chough's eggs. Some bird had evidently anticipated me this spring in my visit to the Red Leg's nest; however, I suspect the Hoody Crow more than the Daw, for he is an arrant egg thief. About that very time I witnessed a controversy between a pair of Sea-pyets and a Hoody on this very subject. It terminated decidedly in favour of the latter, as he flew off with the apple—no, the egg—of discord impaled on his bill, followed by the frantic shrieks of the two poor Oyster-catchers. Peep! peep! peep! The Hoody Crow's mouth was too full to make a rejoinder.

As to the tameness or wildness of different species of birds, though certainly some species are instinctively much wilder than others, yet the degree must be so very much modified by the treatment they receive in various localities that it scarcely admits of generalisation. Thus, to return to my friends the Rooks, where they are persecuted by the farmer owing to mistaken notions of their being injurious, they become so wary that it is impossible to get within range of them; while here in Iona, where we have rather patronised them on account of their being strangers, we have so far won their confidence that they actually come to pick up crumbs and potatoes thrown from our windows. And so, of course, with every other kind of bird.

XVIII.

IONA, 20*th February* 1853.

I REGRET to think that the correspondence that we have so agreeably kept up for the last year and upwards must soon meet with a check. I propose leaving Iona for London, and have a very great inclination to go out to Canada for a visit, or perhaps for a permanent residence. I have already visited Lower Canada and been along the coast as far north as Labrador, and still further in a southern direction. In fact, I can say that I have killed White Egrets in the West Indian Islands, Pelicans at Port Royal, and Boobies at the Bahamas; but at that time, alas! I let pass glorious opportunities of ornithologising. On this occasion the case will be very different, for I look forward with delightful anticipations to the prospect of killing, to me, new races of birds, or the still greater pleasure of occasionally hailing an old friend—such, for instance, as the Great Northern Diver, which seems to be identical on both sides of the Atlantic. Certainly, in future, wherever the locality in which I am cast, there shall I carry with me a love for Natural History, which will always furnish me with a most agreeable recreation, a solace, a retirement, a refuge always open to fly to from the accidents or annoyances of life.

At the present day Ornithology takes its place as a respectable science, and especially as a popular and pleasing one. *Blackwood* remarks:—"We remember the time when the very word *Ornithology* would have required interpretation in mixed com-

pany, and when a naturalist was looked on as a sort of out-of-the-way but amiable monster." Happily the case is very different at the present day. Nature is more esteemed in this generation. Some grave author makes the remark that in the time of our youth we ought to acquire and lay up as great a quantity as possible of material for agreeable meditation in our old age. What, then, can serve this purpose more durably than the study of Nature?

Naturalists are generally noted for length of days, for continuing their pursuits with unabating zest till the very last, and for a spirit of piety, which is naturally induced by looking through Nature up to Nature's God.

The day of my departure is not, nor is likely to be, accurately determined on as yet; for primarily it will depend upon the weather, and secondarily on when I feel in the vein for getting under weigh.

Remarks in allusion to the state of the weather form such a considerable item in the small-talk of every Briton that foreigners, blessed with a more equable climate, sometimes ridicule us for it. In Iona, however, the weather is a matter of such important interest that it is not a mere conventional salutation to remark upon it; for the business of the day, and even the outgoing of the post, is decided most arbitrarily by the capricious elements, the wind, the weather, and the tide.

Since the 7th of this month we have had a remarkable and unusual frost, both for intenseness and duration, accompanied, for the most part of the time, with blustering gales from the north and north-east, which, in spite of the bright sun shining in a

cloudless sky, pierce to the very bone and shrivel up and benumb the flesh. It brought nothing very unusual, except some Woodcocks, Redwings, Fieldfares, and Golden Plovers, which do not frequent our island except in such cases of emergency; and surely now they seem very humbled and subdued! The Golden Plovers were in great number and excessively tame. On their first arrival the flocks would allow themselves to be shot at more than once before they would even fly off a short distance; and latterly, though more wary, yet I crawled within arm's length of them. They are nearly all more or less mottled underneath with black.

I have to thank you and my Glasgow friends once more for your obliging opinion of my communications, which is more than they are entitled to, as they are simply the daily thoughts which occupy my mind when wandering along the hill-side, or floating in solitude upon the blue water. If at such times I had the means of putting them immediately on paper, I am sure they would be much fresher and better worth keeping. But while dipping the feathering oar with one hand into the briny element, I doubt the possibility of keeping the goose feather dipping with the other hand into the inky fluid. This reminds me of a sapient remark from a London tailor. Last summer I took some home-woven tartan to be fashioned into habiliments by a Metropolitan artist. "You observe this cloth," said I, "is entirely made by the hand-looms of the common fishermen of Iona." "Oh, indeed, sir! Ah, yes, I suppose they take their looms out with them in their boats, along with them, to work while they are fishing."

It will not be very long before the "season" commences again,

as here is March begun, and the winter actually past, before we were aware of its having more than just set in. I begin to observe that every successive year passes quicker and quicker than its predecessor. They used to go something cannie-like, but now they go by steam, and threaten as one advances in years to outstrip even this, revolving, like the fly-wheel of a high-pressure

engine, round and round with dizzying velocity, flying with increase of impetus at every turn; or bounding like a mill-stone down a steep brae-side, and leaving as little trace of their course —till the crisis comes—the boiler bursts, the engine sticks at "dead-point," and the mill-stone plunges with a splash into the black tarn, and is seen no more.

The only objection to rural retired life is that from its monotony the time slips along too smoothly and unperceived. Old Chronos seems to be jogging round the hour-hand of his dial with his finger and cheating us out of our minutes; shaking the sand through his glass, or "flogging" it, as is done at sea—that is, whipping it round in legerdemain style before the last grains have fully run out, which has the double advantage of shortening the current hour and of giving the new one a fair start in life, the united effect of which brings the sleepy-headed watch on deck so much the nearer to their snug moorings in "blanket bay," the haven where they would be. When I apply the word "monotonous" to country life, it is not my intention to imply anything like *ennui*. No, far from it! Each season in its turn brings constantly varying scenes and entertainments, each day brings its own duties and occupations, and each morning we rise with refreshed zeal to the cheerful labours of the day, and renewed zest to its sober delights. Still, though we travel through a fertile and pleasant land, yet the slight undulations over which we pass are so uniform in appearance, and so unvaried in direction and general regularity of outline, that we skim along in a delightful, dreamy, contemplative mood, till—rat, tat!—we go over some accidental rut and are shaken into sudden consciousness that we are just passing the thirtieth, fortieth, or fiftieth mile-stone upon our journey of three-score miles and ten, and are quite surprised at the killing pace at which we are going.

The old exemplification of this matter is the comparison between the apparent lengths of a measured mile on the lone highway and one through the streets of a city. But there is another, very

intelligible to a sportsman, and which has often struck me. Measure off exactly 50 yards in the garden, or before the house, across flower-bed and gravel walk; it looks a "stunning long shot." Step off the same on the bare hill-side—it looks like nothing; while upon the still smoother surface of the sea it looks *less* (excuse the Hibernicism); and one not accustomed to a boat bangs away at birds out of shot, wondering he does not hit them. Talk of sermons in stones! Here is a moral in a measuring tape—namely, that the marked and varied life of one who "knocks about" in the world seems of much greater length than the same short span of one, like the Vicar of Wakefield, whose whole adventures were those of the fireside, and whose only migrations were from the blue bed to the brown.

Enough of secular subjects—now to the divine study of birds! And let us begin with the sacred bird of Rome, the noble Goose.

A little book called *Rural Economy*, among many excellent directions about the management of beast and bird, contains this shocking statement: "A breeding stock consists of *five* geese and a gander." All the blood in my body rushes to my face, threatening an immediate attack of apoplexy, as I repeat it; but I cannot hold my peace and hear my worthy friend traduced and calumniated. The Gander accused of polygamy! Our best friend at bed and board; ever a warm and yielding one at the former, and the glory of the latter—where, if not exactly the friend of our bosom, he is at least that of an adjoining region. Besides all which, he is concerned in the writing of everything ever written that is worth reading—excepting what was inscribed by the antique stylus, or is scrawled with a crow-quill in delicate angular

hand, as if a fly had dipped its legs in ink and then polkaed over the pink satin paper till they were dry. As for the *iron* pens of modern days, we leave them to the dun and the tax-gatherer, to scratch their noxious circulars in characters of gall and vinegar.

To hear this concentration of all that is valuable, amiable, and lovely, stigmatised—branded as a polygamist! This scandalous outrage on his domestic character makes all the down of his head to stand on end; and he puts into my hand the primest of his wing primaries, to write and beg of you and his Glasgow friends to do him justice. He can hardly be acquitted by a jury of his peers; as, besides their being themselves implicated in the case, their dictum would not have sufficient weight with the public, on account of the vulgar prejudice entertained as to their intellectual faculties. Is he like the gallant, gay Lothario, who struts before his harem of douce, brown-coated wives, or yet like his compatriot of the "Guse-dub," the domesticated and demoralised Drake? No; he is the most constant, the most domestic of all domestic fowl. If the sole choice of his heart happens to be lying in the straw, how constant is his attendance at the entrance of the nest! In tender cacklings he diverts her confinement with the latest gossip of the barn-yard, or with contemplation of that bright day when from the lifeless-looking eggs shall burst forth a beautiful family of downy goslings. How valiantly he defends the nest from insult! But the height of all his happiness is reached if he be allowed to sit upon it himself, if only for a minute or two. Then, when the delighted father first sees his brood, immoderate is his joy; with loud cries and outstretched

wings he goes through the ceremony of kissing successively each one of his sallow young ones with open bill; and so boisterous is this outburst of his paternal emotions that it is sometimes dangerous to the safety of the objects of it. However, when this danger is past he becomes the vigilant defender and guardian; and, should the mamma have suffered from the protracted duties of incubation, he willingly condescends to be the tender nurse. Then his social virtues! Some time ago one of our geese got one of its legs broken. I carefully set it with splints and bandages, and then the invalid was put into an outhouse, where she lay in a hamper—perfect rest being strictly enjoined. Every morning after this the other geese came, and, stopping under the window for a little while when on their way to the green, inquired in gabbling accents after the health of the invalid, who replied in the same language, "As well as could be expected;" "Passed a better night than usual," &c.; upon which off they marched, satisfied with the bulletin. This continued till she recovered, when she returned to the flock, who received her with open arms—or rather wings—and noisy acclamations, showing their recognition of her; for, of course, a stranger would have been driven off. I will say no more, though much remains unsaid, but conclude with the bold avowal that I am a friend to the Goose. Yes, I love the Goose. And so the matter ends — unless any witless knave takes me up with some of the time-honoured but abusive jests in connection with the dear bird. If so, I shall know him to be but some shallow fellow who could not so much as say "Bo!" to a Goose.

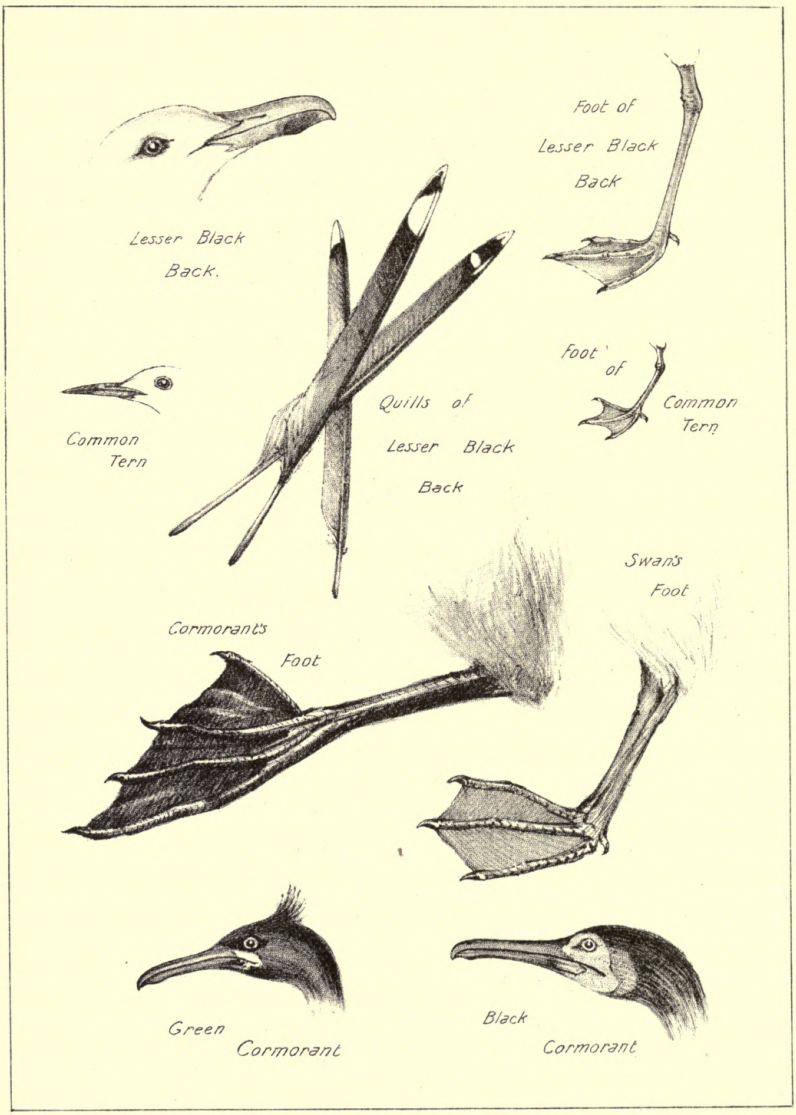
Feeling conscious of having passed the Rubicon one half ounce, I may as well carry on till I expend myself, as it is fated that the revenue shall be augmented by a supplementary penny. What must be, must. Pray bear with me. These are written by candle-light, and with the assistance of a pipe of the blessed weed "that cheers but does not inebriate." I hope the reader may be in an equally auspicious mood.

The long-promised note upon the Cormorant is at my pen's point, but it must be again deferred for fear of your patience giving way—"Frien's are like fiddle-strings; they maunna be o'er straitchit,[1] or they crack"—but I will send it by an early post.

My departure I have postponed, not for a day or two, but for a bold stretch of three weeks.

During some severe weather last week a party of five Swans paid us a visit of a few days. Unfortunately a bungler succeeded in making them very timid and wary, so that one of the islanders and myself only succeeded in wounding one, which escaped across the Sound and fell into the hands of some ruthless barbarians, who immediately, like so many hungry ogres, fell upon it, plucked and eat it. All I recovered from them was the head and the legs, which were too indigestible for even their rapacious maws. I have taken a life-size drawing of the head; it is as large as that of a cat. The feet I have added to my collection of "spogs" (*Anglicè*, paws) of web-footed birds. They are easily prepared by nailing them to a board with pins, when they soon dry, retaining the open position you wish them to have; then

[1] Straightened, stretched. *Strait*, to straighten; *straict*, a narrow pass; *straitit*, constrained.—Ed.


Foot of
Lesser Black
Back
Lesser Black
Back.
Foot
of
Common
Tern
Common
Tern
Quills of
Lesser Black
Back
Swans
Foot
Cormorants
Foot
Green
Cormorant
Black
Cormorant

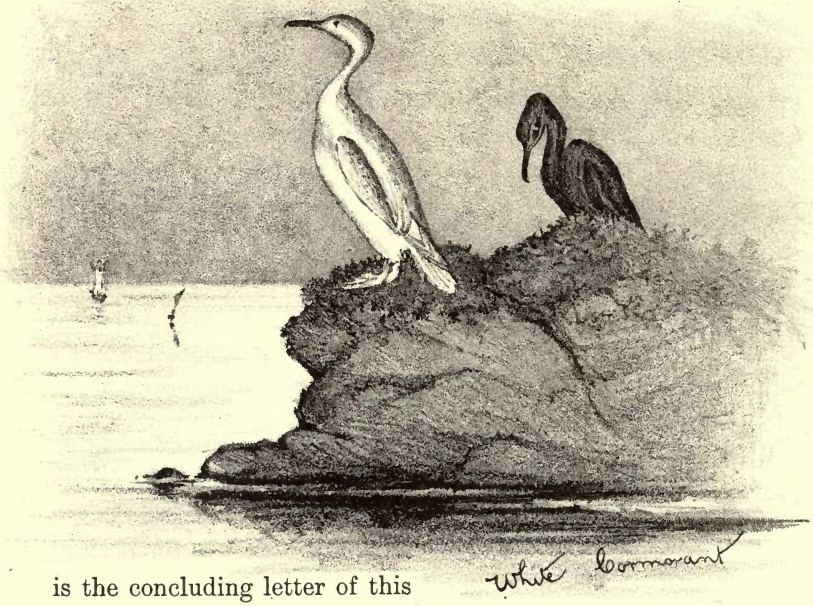
put a little sealing-wax where the joint was; cut, and rub them over with varnish; and they make rather an amusing collection. What a contrast between these Swans' huge splay feet and the Petrel's delicate little paddles, or the Tern's minute red slippers! Mould a pair of Cormorant's feet round a wooden peg to show how adapted they are for perching. Let one of the loon's feet dry in the position of being drawn forward, when it collapses into a mere knife blade, as a contrast to a foot giving the impelling stroke, which expands to the size of a mason's trowel.

I shall be very much interested to hear of the success of your researches after the Bridled Guillemot (*Uria lachrymans*). It is always described as having the white rim round the eye, extending backwards down the neck, which is exactly the description of the three specimens that I have seen here. But in some books I see it mentioned that "there is a variety of *Uria troile*, on the coast of Wales and elsewhere, having a white line between the eye and the bill, like the Razor-bill." Is this a variety or a third distinct species? It is not usual for Nature to play such pranks among wild birds, where a variety is a *lusus naturæ* of rare occurrence. However this may be, I shall not *bridle* my tongue in defence of his individuality, even should your looked-for essay on the subject pronounce his non-existence. As a doughty controversialist once said when getting the worst of an argument, "You may convince me, but I won't believe it." So shall I be like a sturdy Saxon, whose boast is that even when he is beaten he is not aware of it, and with colours nailed to the mast, whether we sink or swim, to the last gasp my cry is, "Uria lacrymans and no surrender!" On all other points I am your obedient friend.

XIX.

IONA, *9th April* 1853.

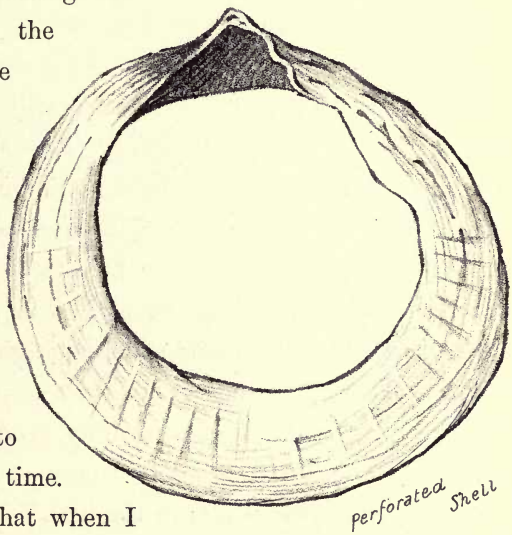
THE day I had fixed for my departure was so stormy and unpleasant that I put it off for another week. I send with this a practical commentary on the Cormorant, which you will perhaps think rather rambling, but as it



is the concluding letter of this series of our Ionian correspondence, I trust it will be looked upon with lenity.

Last year there came under my observation a curious accident which had happened to a Cormorant, and is perhaps worth mentioning. The bird was shot by an old fisherman, and I saw

it immediately after it was brought ashore. It had a remarkable white mark round the neck, which, on examination, we found to be a perforated clam shell, forming a necklace or collar. There are great quantities of limpet and bivalve shells cast on the sandy beaches, many with a hole worn through the centre by the constant friction and tossing about by the wash of the waves. It was probably while pursuing the small flounders near the bottom of one of these sandy bays that the poor bird chanced to run its head into the noose. The shell had worked its way down to the shoulder, where it seemed, from the marked and frayed appearance of the feathers, to have been a considerable time. It fitted so accurately that when I drew it off the head would barely go through. The bird was fat, though he must have been prevented from swallowing any but very small fish, for he could not distend his throat. He had probably become reconciled to his misfortune, and only hunted for small game. I will present you with the identical collar. I would have kept the skin had it not been so cruelly mangled by a heavy charge of "No. 1," fired over the rock from a grim, rusty old three-foot-in-the-barrel, equally dangerous to "firer" and "firee."



It is wonderful what work is done with such antique-looking tools as these, even, as I have sometimes seen, when fired off by a fiery peat applied to the touch-hole. The old man holds the gun, and one of the bairns applies the match, and picks up the game—if there is any; as for the gunner, he is lying flat on his back, with both eyes filled with red-hot peat dust.

M'Gillivray describes the Sea Eagle as often spending his leisure hours in floating upon the waves.[1] It must be a singular and striking sight to see a bird of this description upon the water. The only terrestrial bird I ever saw willingly take to the sea was the Sea Pyet or Oyster-catcher. I once saw a large flock pitch down upon the water and remain swimming for some considerable space of time. It was in a spot where the water was literally alive with young Saithe or Coal-fish—a semi-fluid mass—"a brochan[2] of cuddies," as the natives express it, which probably invited the birds to perform this natatorial feat.

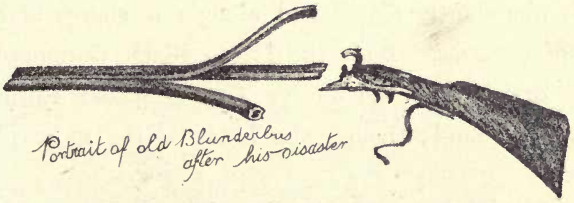
The Sea Pyet, when wounded, not only swims with ease, but if pressed dives with great activity, rendering it no easy task to capture it, even with a boat. I once caught a young unfledged Sea Pyet, and placed him in the boat. He instantly jumped out. I thought the dissolute young rascal had committed suicide; but

[1] The Editor can remember no such statement of M'Gillivray's; and our author rightly remarks that such a proceeding on the part of a Sea Eagle must be a "singular and striking sight."

[2] In order that to the mind of a Sassenach the simile may seem fitting, we give Jamieson's translation of the word *brochan*—viz.: "Oatmeal boiled to a consistence somewhat thicker than gruel;" and to explain that, to be true to the native's acceptation of the said simile, the brochan should not be "off the boil." We may further endeavour to enlighten the uninitiated by stating, what may not be generally known south of the Gates of the Highlands, that "cuddies" is a word of Scandinavian origin, not applied there to brainless men, but to juvenescent specimens of Saithe or Coal-fish.—Ed.

looking through the clear green water, I was relieved to see my young friend leisurely walking about the sandy bottom, as if he had no immediate intention of revisiting the upper regions of air, and evidently quite at ease, though it must have been his first taste of salt water.

I have two or three times seen the Oyster-catcher in a rather unusual position—namely, on a newly-ploughed field, as if searching for worms.[1]



Certainly, the land was liberally covered with a layer of seaweed, which is extensively, almost exclusively,

[1] A habit common enough along the big rivers of the East of Scotland, but rarer in the West.—ED.

used as manure here, so that the misguided birds might not have been aware that they were committing a trespass, supposing they were still within the sacred bounds of "below high water mark," the property of great and small, that rich estate formed by Waders of high and low degree.

All the Wading birds take boldly to the water when wounded and their retreat is cut off by land, but none so readily as the Oyster-catcher.

An Oyster-*catcher*—as if you had to run after an oyster to catch it! What an exciting race!

XX.

The Cormorants,

Here commonly called the Scart, which, like much of the Low Country Scotch dialect, is a corruption of the Gaelic word *Scarbh.*

It is abundantly distributed along our shores and over the surface of our seas. Both the Great Black Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) and the Lesser Green-crested Cormorant (*P. graculus*) are found; though the latter is the more plentiful of the two.

The caves of Staffa and of the neighbouring islets are exclusively peopled by this kind; while beneath the stupendous cliffs of Bury and Gribun on the mainland of Mull the Black Cormorant is found in great numbers, nesting and roosting

among the wave-worn cliffs. The habits of the two species seem to be very similar, and I am not aware of any reason for their thus selecting these separate localities.

At a distance the Black Cormorant is easily distinguished by the marked white patches on the cheeks and thighs, which contrast very conspicuously with the rest of its black plumage. The Green Cormorant, on the contrary, has no break in the

sombre tint of its sad-coloured livery, with the exception of the bright yellow skin upon the face, which is, however, sufficient to betray the bird when sitting—otherwise quite invisible—upon the high ledges in the twilight obscurity of its cave.

The crest is another distinction between the two races, though in itself an uncertain criterion; for, while the black bird often has the crest partially developed, the green-*crested* one is not always thus ornamented, even in birds actually shot on the nest in the height of the breeding season; though in winter, on the other hand, I have once or twice obtained individuals with a splendid long "queue." Nevertheless, it must in general be regarded as a nuptial ornament, and a very graceful one, of the adult Green-crested Cormorant, when attired in his rich and beautiful wedding garment of summer.

The immature Black Cormorant takes more than one season to attain its full bulk, and its plumage in the meantime is a dull black above and a greyish-brown mixture beneath; but the young Green Cormorant is clad in an entire neat suit of dark bottle green, from the very commencement of its career after leaving the nest.[1] Another distinction may be observed in the eyes; those of the last mentioned species are of a brilliant clear green, like lustrous emeralds, while the irides of the other are simply grey or brown.

Many people feel a sort of aversion to the Cormorant as a kind of "unclean bird." It certainly has an ugly name for

[1] There is some misapprehension here, as the Green Cormorant does not attain to its full green and adult plumage quite so suddenly as indicated by our author.—Ed.

greed and gluttony. Milton supposes Satan to have entered its form before assuming that of a serpent.

> "Thence up he flew, and on the tree of life,
> The middle tree, and highest there that grew,
> Sat like a cormorant."

Indeed, the sepulchral gloom of its dark, dank abode, its sombre plumage, melancholy aspect, its silence, but rarely broken, and then only by a sad foreboding croak, might all join to inspire a

sort of prejudice against the poor bird, independently of his rather dirty habits. And truly his cave does not smell savoury; and even from the rock out in the open sea, where groups of these grave-looking citizens of the deep sit and rest themselves on their return from the fishery business, when approached to leeward, a breeze is borne down upon us very unlike what is wafted off the balmy Spice Islands, but rather such as we might expect from a city of Esquimaux when holding high wassail in brimming beakers tapped from a stranded whale.

But, after all, this bird will be found to be as beautiful a work as any that Nature has turned of hand. Its shape and long neck are far from inelegant. See it dive! How gracefully it springs clean out of the water, throws a somersault in the air, and disappears head foremost into the blue depths! Then the lovely plumage of the Green Cormorant—a mixture of green and gold, like the most gorgeous shot silk raiment, traversed by delicate bands of rich velvet. Its beak is of gold, and its eyes living emeralds. He also bears a plume upon his head as a mark of his nobility.

From this high cliff we look down upon the vast heavers of the angered ocean, as they come rolling in with mighty sweep and hurl themselves upon the iron-bound shore. All around is milk-white foam and dreadful agitation. There, in the very midst of this, what Byron would term "hell-broth," floats a black speck. That is the Cormorant following its sport, where the stoutest work of man's hand would be as a toy, where all his skill and inventions could not gain a minute of life. Here comes a huge wave; its white crest already begins to curl over its swelling bosom with a crashing sound; now it gets steeper and steeper as it rolls onward, till it rears up like a high green cliff overshadowing a horrid abyss beneath. At the critical moment down goes the Scart, and when the danger has gone past and the hurly-burly has subsided, up he springs again into day, unconcernedly discussing a nice fresh young cod, which he had caught while taking refuge in the bosom of the Great Mother.

This plea for the Cormorant reminds me of a reply made by a worthy old friend, who for half a century has ruled the glens

of Mull with his ramrod—"All God's works are lovely; every beast and every bird is bonniest of its kind. 'Deed, sir, and the Hoodie Craw hersel' is a pratty, pratty beast, if it were na that she's just *ver—min.*"

Ah! and if we catch a Scart, is he not capable of being discussed in another way? Indeed he is.

Keep a sufficiently long time, skin off his jacket, and make him into soup. It requires a couple to make it good, and then I defy the Court of Common Council or a jury of aldermen to detect the difference between it and the finest hare soup. A curry does indifferently well; and the liver, which is of a large size, is as good as that of the Goose.[1]

Having decided the gastronomic value of our friend, let us consider the ways and means of obtaining a few individuals to garnish our larder withal.

In winter, especially when stormy, we shall see them fishing at half tide close along the rocks and in the shallow sandy bays. They are wary; and, diving, they take care to get a good offing if they see the least danger. But it is nice practice to stalk one, running from one hiding-place to another, while the bird is below water, till we succeed in attaining a rock that is within reach of him. As he emerges from the water he turns about his head in search of anything suspicious, and carefully examines the shore before he will dive again, lest it conceal a lurking foe. In good weather it is more amusing to follow our game upon its own element. We should approach the swimming bird to windward,

[1] We can testify to the truth of the remark by our author regarding the similarity of scart soup to hare soup. *Vide* also p. 262.—Ed.

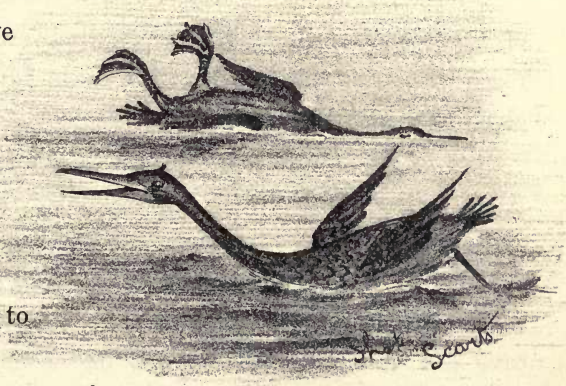
for he prefers rising against the wind. In calm weather, if well gorged with fish, he cannot rise without the help of the breeze under his wings. When he sees his retreat cut off in this direction, he swims about in evident perplexity, and often allows the boat to come within fatal distance.

Their quickness in knowing their enemies is very amusing. A heavy, lumbering fishing-boat is allowed to pass close by, while the quiet, insidious approach of the small gun-bearing skiff is suspected and fled from. At first they take short dives; but if, thoroughly alarmed, they begin racing—that is, diving and swimming determinedly away—it is then almost useless to attempt to overtake them. When a bird sees it is no longer pursued, after rising to the surface, he flaps his wings, then expands them for a moment till he feels the breeze, and with laborious strokes rises off the water. These, as well as other sea birds, always try to get to windward by crossing the bows of a boat coming under

sail, and they generally escape by getting the weather gauge, either by the boat being unable to get up to them, or, at worst, they can readily take flight up the wind when danger becomes pressing.

There are certain rocks very much frequented by the Cormorants, where they rest and bask in the sun, often with wings outspread, "hanging out to dry." Here they often sit motionless for hours, quite erect, looking exactly like rows of gigantic black bottles set out for a *soirée* of Fingalians, the gigantic heroes who built up the columns of Staffa for their banqueting hall, when "the song and the *shell* went round."

As the boat draws nearer, signs of uneasiness begin to appear—awakening yawns, stretching of wings and waddlings to the overhanging edge of the rock; all the long necks are twisting about in active motion, as if the prudent creatures were trying to thoroughly "see their way clear" before taking a leap. Crack! goes a cartridge at sixty yards, when down go the black gentry, tumbling and rolling head over heels down the face of the rock, and disappear into the water.



You think you have murdered the whole gang; but wait a second, and then they all come merrily bobbing up to the surface, a forest

of black necks swimming away to windward. A few are within reach, and—piff, puff!—shoot 'em down is the word—no quarter given to them now.

Lastly, we may visit one of the caves, as the swell of the Atlantic has sunk into a calm slumber, and will allow us to venture into it without danger to the boat. At the first alarm a string of birds pours forth, almost into our faces; still many remain sitting on the high shelters, even though we enter the cave and re-fire repeatedly, creating a most dreadful din and bringing down splinters of the rock from the lofty vaulted roof.

If the young "Scartlings" are hatched, they keep up a perpetual clamour very different from their taciturn parents; the report of the gun frequently brings one toppling over the edge of its coarse sea-tangle nest—a most ungainly-looking youngster. If we like to wait here till evening, we might get almost any number of birds, as they come flying home at sunset, for the Cormorant keeps early hours and retires to rest with the sun. But we are contented with what we have done and will now stay our hand from slaughter.

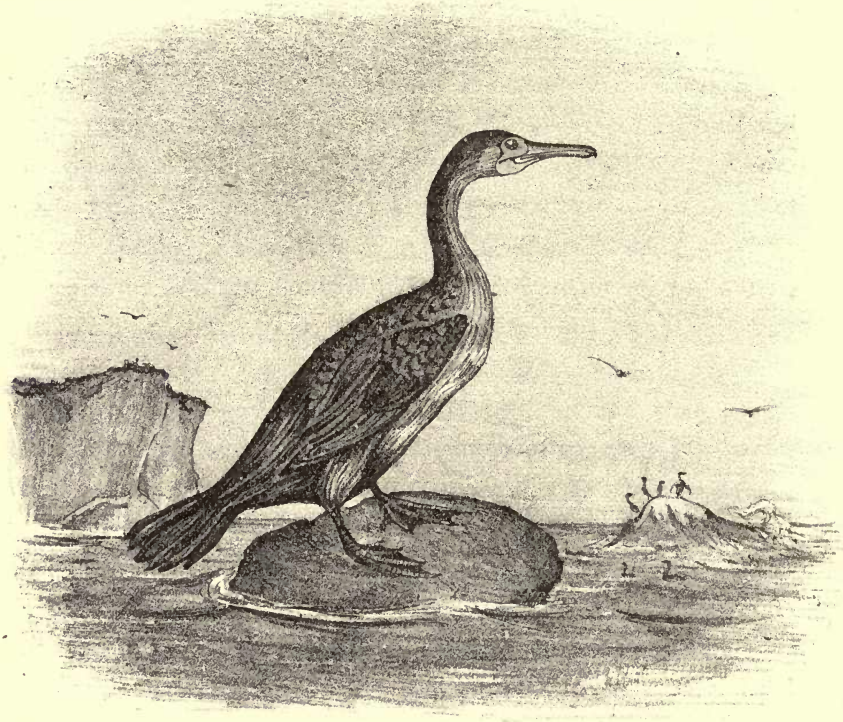
The Cormorant is very tenacious of life. When winged, he seems to recover new life as soon as he strikes the water, and escapes by diving. When wounded, they sometimes disappear in a mysterious manner, though there are plenty of quick eyes in the boat, and all around is as smooth as a polished mirror. Yet the wounded bird is not to be seen, and is believed by the boatmen to have gone to the bottom—to remain there, out of spite.

Some time ago I heard of a party of fishermen visiting a Scart's cave by night. A fire being lighted, the poor birds came fluttering down from their roosts, and were killed with sticks. However, in the midst of the confusion—smoke, darkness, flapping wings, and whirring of revolving shillelahs—an unfortunate fellow was mistaken by a comrade for a gigantic Phalocrocorax. The sharp crack of a broken skull was heard, instead of the dull thud of smitten feathers, and the victim was taken home in the bottom of the boat as insensible as the bed of dead Cormorants on which he lay.

Had the accident terminated fatally the coroner's verdict would have been "Served him right;" but the Highlander's cranium

was not particularly damaged, though the shillelah was considerably injured by the collision.

The Cormorant generally flies low along the surface of the water to and from its fishing ground; though sometimes when making a long passage, especially in windy weather, it soars up to a very great height. Occasionally, in a perfect calm, when the sea is as smooth as if solidified into crystal, a bird may be seen drying his wings without leaving the water; he sits erect in the sea, floating about for half an hour at a time with his wings spread in the air, presenting a curious appearance.



XXI.

ARDRISHAIG, 24*th February* 1860.

IT gave me very great pleasure to receive your letter. It recalled to my memory the pleasant correspondence we had years ago. I have been always proposing either to write to you or to call next time I should be in Glasgow; but alas! the causeway paved with good intentions leads to—nothing, as it turned out in this case. I am thankful to you for having broken the charm, and as you have spoken first, I hasten to speak in reply—after the manner of ghosts in such cases.

I know that you are an enthusiastic naturalist, and that your favourite department is that most fascinating one, Ornithology, which offers the combination of science and sport, of out-of-door intellectual exercise and amusement, in a greater degree than any of its sister "ologies." I used to consider myself when slaughtering the Iona Sea-fowl as doing a little in this way, and instead of being a mere animated ramrod, taking aim and loading up again as fast as it can, I persuaded myself that I was doing a little of what I might call the "Sport ornithologomancy." My experiences have been very limited since I left Iona. Certainly

during the two years that I rambled over a considerable part of Upper Canada I carried with me a gun and an eye towards birds; but in my present locality, though there is abundance of the common kinds of wild fowl, there is rarely anything to gladden the eye of the collector and make his pulse bound and his aim tremble as he deliberately "gets on" a fine specimen. As you do me the compliment of asking me to contribute some more papers on this subject, I shall be happy to write a letter or two in the old friendly style, though the matters be but small; and should they be too garrulous (for I am older than I was five years ago) for any other purpose, I dare say they will be an amusement to an old friend.

In our neighbourhood, and I should suppose generally elsewhere, this has been a rare season for wild fowl; the unusually severe winter has assembled more than the ordinary amount of Mallard and Widgeon, with the usual proportion of Pochards, Seals, &c., which mostly congregate where the reflux of the tide leaves an expansive margin of muddy acres on which the hungry million pick up their pasturage.

When the tide is out more than a mile of good mud is laid bare, prolific in every delicacy dear to the Wading or Web-footed gastronome. Thence you may hear all night long their wild cries ringing on the frozen air; tribe calling upon tribe in varied cadence, borne in from the distant ebb so distinctly upon the silent night wind, that every characteristic note may be heard and the number of the various species estimated by the observer, even comfortably in bed, half a mile inland.

But when the moon rises high and near her full, clear and

frosty in the bright blinks between the driving north-east snow squalls, throwing a sheet of white light over the distant sea and the dried-up bed of the loch, which it has temporarily relinquished

—out there, breaking across that luminous pathway in a great black streak, is a teeming mass of life, dabbling, squattering in the ooze, sailing in black specks across the bright pools, surging to and fro. Now a noisy contention rises among groups of the vast multitude,

as they press on one another, or rival clans intrude too closely. But such disputative cacklings subside again as quickly as they rise, and nothing but the crow of an old cock Widgeon or the husky quacking of a veteran Mallard is to be heard above the general chorus of many thousand pairs of *spoon-bills*,[1] all sputtering and shovelling away for dear life at the ample feast of fat sea worms and rich pasturage of sea grass set before them.

While we are watching them, or perhaps by a crafty approach are hoping to have a nearer view, the report of a gun comes booming over the flats and rumbles away into silence among the opposite hills. Its last echoes are, however, drowned in a new and louder noise; it was but the signal for a universal uproar, a hubbub, a hurricane of confusion. Far and near there now rises the thunder of many wings rebounding off the half-frozen mud, as the birds spring into the air, acting as a rolling bass to the shriller sounds of anger and alarm issuing from myriads of throats in varied keys. The Curlew hovers in the air, shrieking frantically; the Golden Plover gives his wild plaintive whistle as he dashes by on hawk-like wing; the Sea-pyet, eddying in a spiral column over a stricken comrade who is trying hard to gain the water, ring out their shrill querulous "Peep, peep!" the Heron gives a hoarse, angry yell as his broad flapping pinions catch the light sea breeze and lift him out of danger; the heavy Scotch Duck[2] quacks as she bustles away on busy wing; a few Bernacle Geese rise and go off in good order in single file, sounding an angry clang of alarm; any unknown quantity of Sand-

[1] A family name evidently, as intended by our author.—Ed.
[2] *Anas boschas. L.*—Ed.

pipers, Turnstone, and other "mud-larks," give vent to their feelings in shrill pipings. But all this is secondary to the clamour of the Widgeon, who, in vast flocks, distractedly wheel round and round with whistling cries and whistling pinions, calling all heaven and earth to witness their distress, their grief, how "their nerves have been shaken and their rest has been marred" by that fatal sound, the ignition of nitre. It takes a long time before confidence begins to be restored; but gradually the uproar subsides, and the scattered bands begin to settle down again from their aerial gyrations to resume their interrupted diet. Still some wary old Curlew continues at intervals to blow off his alarm-whistle—very different from the pleasant, bubbling cry, half wail, half gurgle, which proceeds from the contented Curlew when, in peace and safety, he bores deep into the cool sand and feels a soft sea-slug wriggling in his mandibles—the note which has won for him his Gaelic name of *Gul-buin*, Musical Wailer.

The worst of it is, that each sonorous alarm, as it proceeds from the cunning old "whaup's" throat, sets off his tattling little neighbour—the Redshank—into a little hysterical screaming fit as a response, producing a third response—not remarkable for piety or elegance of diction—from a gentleman not two hundred yards away, lying prone upon the mud, who is anxious to put his benumbed limbs in motion, and would at that moment cheerfully give all his worth to wring the little brute's neck, and give that long-billed old fellow something to squeal for; for he knows that as long as their unnecessary clamour keeps the whole shore in a fidget, so long must he lie in that ignominious position in brotherhood with the old bernacle-encrusted log left there by the last tide.

At high water on moonshiny nights the Widgeon draw to the shore, and land to graze upon the banks at those points where the grass grows quite down to the verge of the sea; and in the daytime some exciting shots may be got from a punt by paddling along the shore, where you may surprise small parties or single

'Stalking Curlews'

birds in the little bays and crevices. Very often on a sunny day, with a sharp north wind blowing, you may catch a little flock napping under a sequestered rock, enjoying the glare of the sun, and sheltered from the wind. Intimate acquaintance with the localities and pet places of the birds is rather essential to success in poking round the shores. Even should you see a vast

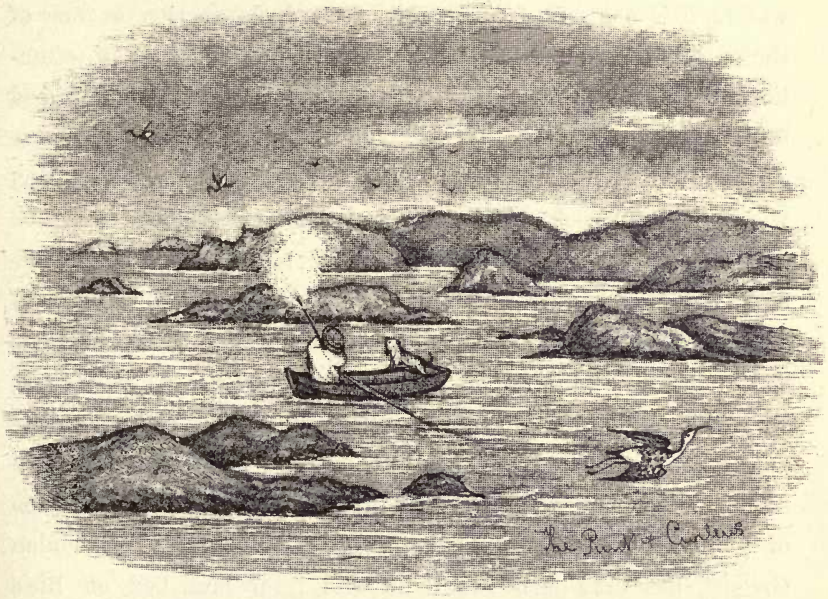
flock riding at anchor a little way out to sea, waiting the turn of the tide,—a long streak, blackening the water for a quarter of a mile,—it is not impossible but that, with good management and better luck, one may get a chance; by drifting, or very gently paddling, one might get within cartridge range before they rise. When the rolling noise, like distant thunder, announces "they are up," boat your oars and handle your gun, and it's hard but one section of the great mass pass within shot. Sometimes, while wheeling about, a second chance may be had before the whole of the scattered flocks form into a dense column, and stream away right in the wind's eye, the old birds whistling and "whewing" their commands as they regulate the order of their going.

On the 13th February (St Valentine's Eve) I observed the Widgeon were beginning to pair. Several loving couples apparently all in all to one another, had separated from the flock. It was almost the first bright mild day of the season; the water was like glass. I followed one couple for a considerable distance. The duck seemed very loath to fly; but as I approached, the drake, who shone resplendent to the sun in full pride of plumage, became fidgety, nodding his head and sailing round his mate, apparently urging her to fly with him. At last, unable to stand it any longer, he fairly spread his wings, and flapping the stilly surface of the water into rings, rose and was off: but, no! finding his mate did not accompany him, down he dropped again into the water some twenty yards off. I made a circuit after him to avoid starting the duck; as I paddled within fifty yards of that unreasonable female, she remained obstinately still, not moving a feather; apparently she fancied that she so escaped detection,

there being some few floating fronds of seaweed ("knobbed wrack") on the surface about her. Again I started her sorely-tried lord, with exactly the same result. He would *not* go without her. Just then, however, a sudden whim crossed her capricious ladyship's head, and, without a moment's notice, off she clipped, with her gallant drake close in her wake. I watched them down, again came up with them, and they again performed the same evolutions. The duck seemed to think she was safe; that I would not shoot such an insignificant object as herself, as long as that splendid fellow of a husband of hers was waiting there to be gone after. His opinion seemed to be about the same, only he could not bring himself to forsake his "duck" to seek his own safety. So he continued swimming round and round her in a wide circle, allowing me to come within fifty or sixty yards, and then flying a little distance, while the duck would only fly when I made straight for her, coming within forty yards. I left them at last, though of course I might have shot them both with the greatest ease. Meeting another couple, under somewhat similar circumstances, I killed the drake. To my surprise, he was not in nearly such highly brilliant plumage as some I had got early in January (of course, long before they had paired). I observed especially that the teal-like green patch behind the eye, which was quite absent in the mated bird, was very highly developed in some of the winter birds. I should suppose that mature age brings this accession of beauty; if so, it is but natural to suppose that these well-plumed old *beaux* are not the birds to be caught pairing the day before St Valentine.

Two or three pair of Teal seemed inclined to act in the same

way as the Widgeon had done. A gallant little fellow—the miniature drake—was in his bright new livery, his red head and freckled grey back gleaming in the sunshine. However, on my nearer approach, the vivacious little couple flitted away like a dream, scarcely leaving a circling ripplet in the glassy mirror,



which this moment had borne, as well as reflected, the trig little figures of the elfin pair.

A few Razor-bills are swimming and dipping about the loch; their long, rattling croaks, borne along the smooth water, sound like a Punch and Judy having a conjugal difference. *Eun du na sqadain* (the black herring birds), the Highland fisherman calls them, in common with the Guillemot; for when he sees them pour out their vast multitudes along the western shores, speckling the

seas as far as the eye can reach, then he knows that it is time for him to bark his nets and patch up the old skiff, in preparation for the great herring campaign.

Though this part of Loch Fyne is abundantly frequented by all the ordinary description of wild fowl, yet, being but inland waters, it is not such a favourable post of observation as one of the outlying islands of the west. From one of those rocky watch-towers you may see the mighty armies of the skies, the plumed hosts of the air, upon their annual march to and fro. Those desolate rocks often shelter a tempest-driven stranger, who otherwise would not seek our shores; and those hyperborean seas give a winter welcome to the hardy Arctic tribes, who disdain the tepid waters and enervating climate of the south. Yet even here in spring we may observe various northern emigrants, dressed in their sumptuous nuptial robes, on their way to the bush fens of Norway, where, steaming under the never-setting sun among the rank sedge and lukewarm waters of the dark lagune, is some well-known secluded spot, far from the ken of man, where many a generation of young Northern, or Red-throated *Diverling* and Sclavonian *Grebelet,* has first seen the light, and been launched on life's troubled waters. The latter bird I observed here in March. Last year a considerable number remained in the loch during the last week of the month, a spell of bad weather retarding their progress. Though going in small parties, they had evidently paired, the couples keeping close together; so close, indeed, that I obtained two specimens at one shot. They were in full summer dress—a very striking and beautiful combination of buff, black, and white. The largely-developed horns of orange plumes are a very striking

feature, and add very much to the quaint appearance of this queer species of water-fowl. The iris is a rich ruby red, with an extremely fine exterior thread of white running round it. I have compared these specimens with a similar one shot in Canada, where it is abundant on the large lakes and rivers. It there rejoices in the descriptive and euphonious title of "Hell-diver." The most remarkable difference is that in the American specimen the horns are connected by a band of the same bright orange buff running across the forehead at the base of the bill. This makes a very characteristic difference in the personal appearance of the two birds, which otherwise seem identical, and seems to be so considered by Wilson, who simply calls it Colymbus, or Podiceps Cornutus, as we do our Horned Grebe on this side of the Atlantic.

So much for the notes of the season, as noted on the banks of the Gilp, which, you see, is a very inferior post of observation to Columba's old isle.

XXII.

ARDRISHAIG, 1*st May* 1860.

IT is a good while since I last addressed you. The fact is that very little of mutual interest has come under my observation here since the Widgeon and Wild Duck have flown away.

I am glad that my effusion on Ducks and mud interested you. I dare say that to a correspondent in town it bore with it some odour of the seaside; some of the aroma of low water mark, that invigorating and mysterious smell made up of brine, seaweed, stranded whelks, and other strange, ancient fishy smells peculiar to the venerable bed of Old Ocean when its outer edges are hung out to dry. I do not doubt you know it and admit it as much as I. To my mind, or rather to my nose, it is more precious and refreshing than the breeze off the meadows with its breath of furze bloom and tedded hay—that is, of course, when it is quite pure and without any of those hateful perfumes marking the nuptials of Cloaca with Neptune, which happily our loch is as yet innocent of. When the tide is out I feel that I am lord of this manor for at least four hours out of the twenty-four. "My right there is none to dispute" in this muddy realm. "Our farm of four acres" is not so valuable as this neutral ground, where lairds are not, and where gamekeepers do not extend. Even Canute, the only king who ever attempted to encroach upon its liberties, signally failed; and though his royal successors in time came to rule the waves of the ocean, yet they never attempted to rule them quite straight round the edge of Great Britain;

there they obey only the eternal decree as given in the Book of Job, and attend the beck of their deputed mistress, the Moon. On this tract of land, which encircles our tight little island, Nature spreads her table twice every day for a large class of her children, especially her long-legged and flat-footed sons and daughters, who revel on juicy molluscs and many an unctious bait, saying shrill graces through their long beaks, till the air rings again with as grateful music to the Giver of good things as any "Non Nobis" that ever was chanted after turtle and venison.

This land of promise has inexhaustible attractions, too, for creatures in a higher walk of life. Here the wary gunner, either by land or on the water, may match his strategy against the Argus eyes of game which is free of three elements; or the more leisurely and meditative polypus hunter may here pick up, Curlew-like, out of the puddles, for that aquarium in his study at home, "all things that are forked, and horned, and soft," and

> "All the dry, pied things that be
> In the hueless mosses under the sea."

The pale invalid, too, is here, sitting on a rock, pumping oxygen and iodine into his lungs as fast as he can, while he is at the same time busy sketching "low water, spring tide." Here all comers are sure to find what they have come for; wild game, sea monsters, or the picturesque, be it what it may, all abound here. Sport active, sport passive, and lots of fresh sea breeze for all.

The Sclavonian Grebes visited us again, but three weeks later than I observed them last year, being in this respect in keeping with everything else this wet and tardy spring. They were in full feather, and in about the same numbers as last year; but the

weather was so stormy and wet all the time they stayed that I could not procure a specimen. They frequently cried to one another when they became separated after a long submarine promenade. Their cry consists of a sharp, grating, rapidly repeated shriek. They were off and on during the third week in April.

The Cuckoo brought his long overdue promissory note of coming spring on the 2nd May; and the Terns or Sea Swallows, who also serve the purpose of marine Cuckoos on the rocky, treeless coast of the Hebrides, filled the air with their shrilly voices on the 12th May, which is three days earlier than they are due at Iona.

Eight days ago I saw a Great Northern Diver in the loch. I watched him for a long time with the glass. He was in full summer plumage. The water being as smooth as glass, I had an opportunity of remarking the characteristic styles of diving distinguishing various members of the genus "Dookers." The Great Northern Diver bends his head gently back, then easily and majestically bows it down under water, without the least sign of hurry or effort; the front portion of his huge bulk subsides gently under the surface like a noble ship settling down by the head; as the tail end disappears after it, two splashes of water are dashed up in the air by an upward stroke of the broad paddles, as the noble bird precipitates himself into the middle depths. The whole process is conducted with the deliberation to be expected from a bird occupying the respectable post of *Mhara Bhuachaille*, or herdsman of the deep, the fanciful name given him by the Highlanders; though, being a bird of easy temper, it does not appear that he really uses his powerful bill and portly bulk to

constitute himself a sea beadle amongst his lesser fish-hunting associates. The Cormorant and Goosander's motion is a striking contrast to that of the Northern Loon. These jerk back their necks preparatory to the spring, then, with a most vigorous effort, almost skip out of the water and plunge down head foremost like a bather taking a "header." A Golden-eye was bobbing up and down over a bank of sea grass, his fatter proportions requiring considerable exertion and a good somersault to get safely down to the bottom. On rising, so buoyant did he appear, that he almost seemed to shoot out of the water ark-like; while he invariably reappeared in the very centre of the rings which the splash of his descent had made. The Great Northern Diver, on the contrary, emerges between four and five gunshots from where he went down, his long, black, frigate-like hull rising slowly to the surface and shooting along with great "weigh on." The Puffins and Guillemots—poor things!—having no neck to speak of, just pop down any way they best can, cocking up their little tail ends towards heaven, as they bid farewell to the superficial things of the world, and opening their wings to assist them to scuttle down.

In the early part of June myriads of Puffins visit us and remain two or three weeks. I have seen them flying in thousands up Loch Gilp and out again, without any apparent object, unless it be that they are disappointed to find it a *cul-de-sac*, and are afraid to fly overland. It really seems as though they had made an error in their navigation, and taking the wrong side of the Mull of Cantyre on their way north, till, on arriving at the head of Loch Gilp, they find themselves nonplussed. Loons, Scarts, and Geese I often see flying high across

the narrow neck of land at Crinan, but never Guillemots and Puffins.[1] Even at their breeding places, when disturbed, the vast flocks keep flying round and round in a great circle—a maelstrom of feathers—its edge forming a tangent with the verge of the cliff; but you may wait in vain for a single bird to encroach upon the line; whatever you shoot, in falling, is sure to plumb the sea below.[2]

XXIII.

ARDRISHAIG, 1*st May* 1861.

ON Monday, 25th February, I started for a trip to Jura. My companion was a young officer in the 78th Highlanders. We drove over the hill to Tayvallich, on Loch Swein, and at Carsaig found a large, smack-rigged boat waiting to ferry us over to Jura, which lay opposite, about eight miles off, though our run was a good deal more, as we bore some way down the coast.

The aspect of Jura is as wild, rugged, and inhospitable as can be conceived. Not a house or vestige of inhabitants is to be seen as far as the eye can reach up and down that interminable line of shaggy brown coast. The triple Paps of Jura, the best known landmark on the west coast of Scotland, are steeped in mist away to the south; while to the north Scarba rears his high round back into the lowering sky, and Corryvreckin—"the boiler of the spotted ocean"—roars at his feet. This is the Scylla and Charybdis of the Ebudean seas. Though ten miles off, we hear

[1] See also at p. 259, text and footnote.—ED.

[2] Not always strictly so with Puffins or Rockbirds in many localities.—ED.

the voices of the vexed waters within the whirlpool, and can see the white waves madly leaping into the air, throwing up the foam towards the sky, as they approaeh the entrance to the gulf between Scarba and Jura. Even where we are, the water is in a state of ebullition,—technically called a "tide rip, or ripple,"—quite distinct from the ordinary waves, which roll along before the wind.[1]

Our skipper gets a pull of the sheet, keeps his luff, and shouts something discordant in Gaelic to his mate in the bow (wearing a garibaldi, red frock, and only one boot), who trims the jib. We surmise that the Sound of Jura is a treacherous water, but have implicit confidence in our skipper, who screws himself into as snug a position as the steering perch upon which he is roosting will admit, and makes horrible faces as he dislodges a bit of tobacco in his cheek with his tongue.

At last we near the land, and shooting past a little rocky point, find ourselves in a smooth, glassy, land-locked bay with a little pier, shrubs growing down to the water's edge, and a gay little yacht floating peaceably at anchor, unconscious of the heaving surf, which ever moans at the narrow portal of this placid little haven.

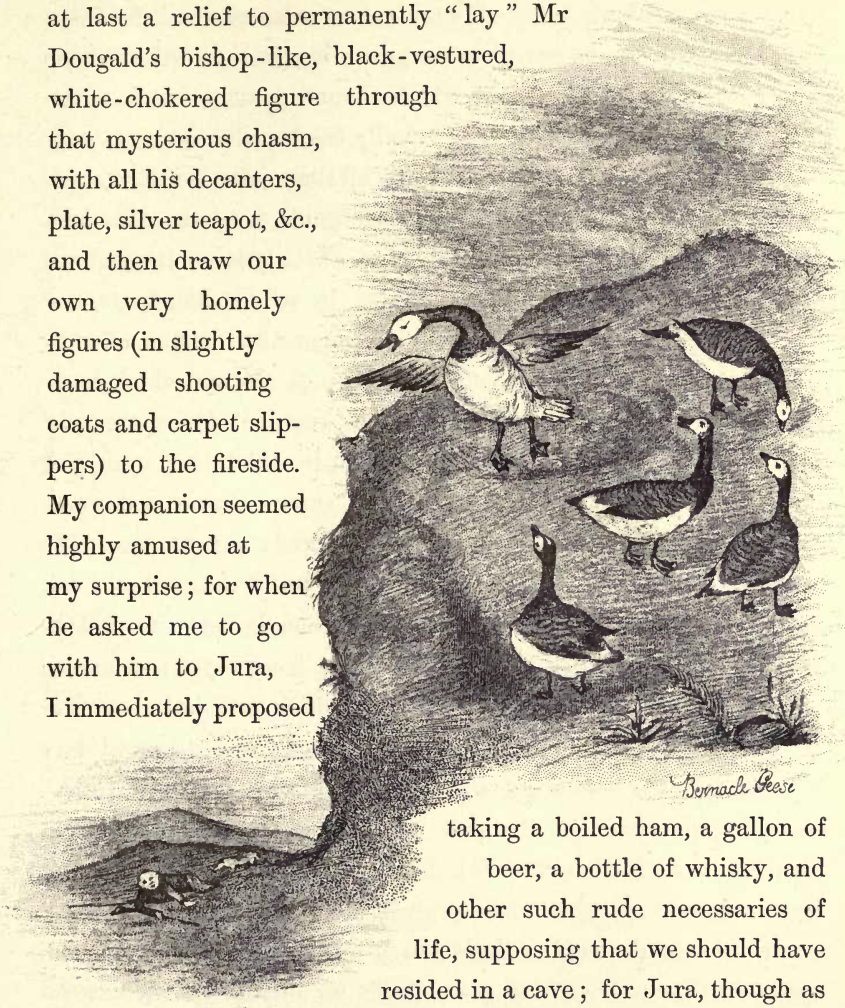
We were received on shore by a couple of gillies, who took our guns and slender baggage, and then ascended a gentle slope of grass like a large lawn, bounded by rocky banks, shaggy with

[1] Such as we ourselves witnessed, near the same place, in July 1887, from the deck of our yacht, interested in an appearance which might well have served as an illustration of the Great Sea Serpent: and one frequently observed and understood by lighthouse-keepers, and others who are accustomed to gaze upon the waters, in all stages of calm or storm, or ebb and flow of tide.—Ed.

brushwood, to the house, which stands on the top of the ascent—a large, low, straggling white house, with old-fashioned windows and numerous slated gables. Stables, offices, and garden nestle behind, sheltered by walls and a few stunted trees. Shelter seems the great object aimed at; not shelter by trees, of which there are none to speak of, but by the surrounding hills and banks. A steep, rocky hill stands in front of the house, leaving an opening on each side for sea views, with turf descending to the shore. The south side of this rocky elevation is laid out in walks, planted with laurels and lauristinus, forming overarching bowers, and with rhododendrons, and fuchsias; one of the latter, fourteen feet in height, already budding, proved the mildness of the climate. Natural caves and grottoes are formed in the cliffy face of the rock, festooned with small-leaved ivy. There is a little grey rocky islet forty yards off, leaving a narrow sound between it and the land.

The owner of the mansion being away, we were gravely welcomed by Mr Dougald, the major-domo. We located ourselves permanently in the smoking-room—a long room on the ground floor—and there we had a very "tall" dinner; soup, fish, beef pudding, wine—a cask of beer had been tapped the moment our boat touched the shore. Such a table spread in such a wilderness gave the impression of an enchanted castle in that wild, remote, hungry-looking island; the more so on account of the stillness and desertion of the house, for we never saw a sign of any other servant in it besides Mr Dougald, who appeared and disappeared in silence and mystery through a noiseless, self-closing, green baize door, ever bearing fresh viands, wines, vivres, or books, maps—anything we chose to ask for or even hint at. This green

baize door became a perfect Herr Döbbler magic hat; and it was at last a relief to permanently "lay" Mr Dougald's bishop-like, black-vestured, white-chokered figure through that mysterious chasm, with all his decanters, plate, silver teapot, &c., and then draw our own very homely figures (in slightly damaged shooting coats and carpet slippers) to the fireside. My companion seemed highly amused at my surprise; for when he asked me to go with him to Jura, I immediately proposed



taking a boiled ham, a gallon of beer, a bottle of whisky, and other such rude necessaries of life, supposing that we should have resided in a cave; for Jura, though as large as the Isle of Wight, may almost be called uninhabited. Since the Norsemen named it *Diur ay*,—the

Deer Island,—Jura has ever been more noted as a deer forest than as a place for colonisation. It may seem a misnomer calling these wild tracts forests, where no cover grows bigger than will harbour woodcock and adders, both of which abound greatly, but it is the term always used even in other equally treeless districts. It may be defended by the undoubted fact that all these islands and western shores once waved with giant trees that would rival the American backwoods. The impenetrable forest of Calydon extended all over Argyle, its terrible depths peopled by wild bulls, boars, and bears, and wilder Britons, formed an impassable barrier even to the invincible legions of Rome. In the peat mosses, which cover so large an extent of the Western Isles, roots of forest trees in great quantities are found in the position in which they grew, five or six feet beneath the surface of the super-accumulated moss. On a steep, rocky bank by the house[1] stands a most venerable witness to this fact, in the presence of a hollow-hearted, old oak tree, twenty-one feet in circumference, though very dwarfed in height. A great part is dead, but some boughs yet had leaves, proving there is life in this old relic, which has been an eye-witness, and perhaps taken part—for the oak was a sacred tree —in the mystic ceremonies of the Druids, "*am fasga ra daraich*" —under the shade of the oak. Edinburgh savants opine that this tree is more than fifteen hundred years old. Another smaller one, a mere boy, which has probably not yet seen a thousand summers, stands near. Both are growing on a steep, rugged, rocky bank, out of crevices scarcely fit for brushwood. The wood of the massy trunk has grown over the rock, like the gouty ankles

[1] Ardlussa House.—Ed.

of an old man bulging over his shoes. It gives the impression of the rock having cut into the heart of the tree.

Having breakfasted at an early hour next morning, we went to the keeper's cottage, where we saw some magnificent Scotch greyhounds for staghunting, and then started off on a journey of five miles over the most desolate, death-like tract of peat-moss, greystone, and interminable straths of coarse, sprit-like grass. A few black tarns or lochans only varied the surface. On one was a solitary diver, alternately appearing and disappearing. This sole instance of life amid such bleak sterility looked like the "*last man.*" One could almost fancy at every dive that he was vainly trying to commit suicide. Glok! glok! bark a pair of Ravens high overhead—the Scandinavian pet, emblematic of ravening and desolation. Hurrah! life at last! A string of wild geese rise in a spiral out of a dismal lochlet with sonorous cacklings. Ah! had we but known they were there! So we trudge on till the head of Loch Tarbert appears in sight. This is the object of our walk, and we trace its banks for some six miles or more of very rough walking. The head of this loch is a large sheet of water some two miles in diameter; then comes a very narrow channel, only about a hundred yards wide, between two high precipitous rocks, which again expands into another basin, speckled with little heathery islets. A mile or so lower down comes another contraction, a narrow rocky channel, through which the tide rushes like a river, swirling round the shattered splintery rocks forming its banks. An almost continuous flitting goes on over its surface of Shieldrake, Eiders, Widgeon, and other wild ducks, to and fro, going and returning from the sea to the feeding grounds afforded

by the shallow, muddy loch-head. The banks are perpendicular crags, clothed with lichen and moss. So narrow is the intervening thread of water in one place, so high and abrupt the opposite cliffs, that it looks as if you could almost jump across. On surmounting one more brown heathery wave, we come in sight of a great gulf, apparently the open sea; but really it is the last and largest reach of the loch. In the distance the land again closes in, leaving only a narrow opening and thread of water communicating with the ocean. Beyond this the hazy outline of blue-grey Islay—*Ila gorm glas*—and above us the eternal Paps, frowning from under a deep veil of rolling cloud.

About a quarter of a mile out from the cliff on which we stood was a group of skerries, or small tide rocks, embossing the surface of the water. Here we threw ourselves on the heather some seventy feet above the level of the water at our feet. The keeper, who accompanied us, produced his glass, and, after a few moments' sweep of the surface of the loch, simply said "Sealchs," and handed the glass to my companion. When it came to my turn to examine the spot indicated, I saw a herd of some two dozen Seals lying in every possible attitude of lazy ease upon two little skerries, the nearest one about a third or a quarter of a mile off shore. Suddenly my attention was arrested by something peculiar; and though I had only seen drawings, and was not in the least on the look-out for such a thing, yet I at once felt sure that I beheld two Harp Seals! Sure enough a pair of Harp Seals lay upon that rock, and a third one on another islet half a mile to the left.

This animal is an inhabitant of Greenland. The instances of

its capture in the British Isles are extremely rare. I had never before seen or even heard of one. It looks much larger than the Common Seal, perhaps from its conspicuous colour against the dark rocks; the others look black at a distance. The Harp Seal is all snowy white, except for a curious harp-shaped black spot across the middle of its back.

This is all I could remember, and devoutly did my congregation listen to me—the ancient keeper and the young officer. Ardently did we long to strike the Harp with a conical bullet; but though I had my American rifle, what could one do at a quarter of a mile without a boat on such a slippery subject as a Seal? So there we lay watching them for some three hours. The atmosphere being pretty clear, we could, with the aid of a good two-foot glass, make them out very distinctly. At last the rising tide gradually submerged them, and eventually floated them off, for they were too lazy to move themselves, and seemed to take a luxurious delight in being gradually washed away.

I noted down the remarks of my companions, who were quite unaware of the existence of any such animal as the Harp Seal. They were struck by its great size, its extreme whiteness, and the black spot upon its shoulder and back. The Seals changed their position more than once, and frequently turned their heads about; but it had no effect upon the colour of their hair. Of course they were quite dry, as we had watched them three hours.

The keeper acknowledged never having seen such a thing before, though he was aware that the fishermen talked of a large Seal, called by them *Ta-beist.*

I wrote an account of these Seals to the *Field,* which produced

a letter from Mr Edward Newman asserting the improbability of its being the Harp Seal, and suggesting the possibility of its having been the Grey Seal (*Halichœrus*). After this I made all the inquiries I could upon the subject, and got at least three pretty authentic cases of the capture of a "White Seal of extraordinary size"—the best one being in Loch Scridain, Mull, by Mr M'Kinnon, a farmer whom I am acquainted with. In these inquiries I have ascertained that the Western Islanders are familiar with three species of Seal—viz., *Ta-beist*, *Rōn*, and *Bodach*. Ta-beist is the name generally applied by the natives to a large Seal, far bigger than the Common Seal, also breeding at a different season, and varying in many of its habits. This Gaelic word is compounded of the obsolete word *ta* (water), which still survives in the name of Loch Tay, and perhaps in the River Teign—*ta a 'n*, and *beist* (beast)—Water beast. Under this title I suspect they confound the Grey Seal (*Halichœrus*), the Great Bearded Seal (*Barbatus*), and perhaps the Harp Seal; in fact, anything which

is neither the Common Seal or *Rōn* (pronounced *Rawn*), or the Lesser Seal or *Bodach*. This word signifies "old man," though it is used in other senses, as when applied to a scarecrow, a hobgoblin, a red rock codfish, &c. In this instance it designates a peculiar dwarf seal, very much smaller than the Common Seal, though consorting with it, and readily giving the impression of its being merely the young of that species. It is, however, now generally recognised as being quite distinct. The minister of Colonsay assured me that he was well acquainted with it, as were all the islanders. Mr James Wilson[1] also mentions that he frequently killed them of the size of a Common Seal at three months old, though they had grey beards and decayed teeth, that were few in number, and remarks that they were not so shy as the Common Seal, nor so solitary as the *Tapvaist* (*Ta-beist*).

Towards the end of March last I received a fresh skin of a recently killed young Seal. It was four feet long without the flippers; very nearly pure white, only slightly tinged with yellow; the hair so soft and long it might be called woolly—admirably adapted for a lady's muff. My friend who sent it is a native of the Hebrides, and kills many Seals annually. He is quite conversant with their habits, as he is also with those of the wild fowl and other creatures which frequent that district, though not scientifically or systematically. The following notice accompanied the skin:—"I send you the skin of a Ta-beist, a young one of

[1] *Naturalist's Library*, Vol. XXV. p. 158, note.

about a month old. It has not got the black spot upon the back. Its habits differ very much from those of the Common Seal. She has her young in November, and it is found three or four yards above high water mark, sometimes quite among the fern and heather. They do not take to the water till six weeks old, when they weigh seventy or eighty pounds. If disturbed, however, the mother will make off with her calf, which she does by taking it up upon her back and so plunging into the sea. Even after a long dive, on rising to the surface, the young one remains securely on its mother's back. She comes to suckle it regularly at high water, but her instinct teaches her to choose such spots that it is impossible either to approach or lay in wait for them without being seen or scented. The colour of the old Seal is a little darker than the one I send you, and the black spot extends over the back of the neck and shoulders. I cannot say at what age the young ones get the black spot. I perceive no difference in their shape from the Common Seal, though the old ones are much larger, being seven or eight feet long and fully thicker than a herring barrel in the body."[1]

This is my friend's history of the Ta-beist. He very thoroughly proves it a very different animal from the Rōn, though leaving it doubtful as to which of the Great Seals he describes, and my conclusion is that he confounds more than one species under the name of Ta-beist, the Grey Seal being probably the commonest of them. The season of breeding seems to be one criterion, also the place of breeding. The Common Seal being apparently the only one

[1] Undoubtedly intended to describe the Great Grey Seal, or *Halichœrus gryphus*.—Ed.

whose young are born close to the water's edge, take to that element immediately, and only suckle at low water upon the sea-weedy rocks just appearing above the level of the sea. All the greater seals seem to breed almost inland, and the young require some weeks or even months to prepare them for the sea, during which time they change their first coat, which is white and woolly, almost lamb-like in appearance.

Seals are now so scarce in all but the remotest spots that it is worth while securing the attention of those few who have any chance of visiting such localities to what we so particularly wish to learn. As the general diffusion of guns within late years has thinned, if not extinguished, many species of wild birds, as well as beasts, so now the almost universal use of the rifle in its most improved and deadly form will probably sound the requiem of some more species of our indigenous fauna, or drive them from our shores.

The Great Grey Seal has black markings also, but not so distinct or pronounced as those of the Harp Seal.[1]

[1] *We are ourselves doubtful of the perfect identification of this Harp Seal by Mr Graham. Yet he was a good and accurate observer, and his argument about the* names *is exactly what we have ourselves ascertained. Tapvaist gives its name to a rock in the Sound of Harris in the Outer Hebrides*—Scuir nan Tapvaist—*which, to our certain knowledge, almost annually holds one pair of very large,* very white, *very ancient Great Grey Seals. The Great Grey Seal appears, in certain lights and shadows, almost of a* silvery white, *and so, indeed, also does the common species* (vitulina). *On this* Scuir nan Tapvaist *(elsewhere spoken of*—vide Fauna of the Outer Hebrides, *p. 24)—they have also, as certainly, bred. But again, on* another *rock of the Sound of Harris, as related in the previous volume of this series already quoted, Harvie-Brown is perfectly confident himself of his identification of a true* Harp Seal, *killed by him, and fired at in the water, within a distance of five or ten yards, but, alas! lost in a strong tide race, the harp marks across the back of the adult being distinctly visible.*—Ed.

XXIV.

KILMORY COTTAGE, LOCHGILPHEAD,
1st February 1863.

THE locality in which I am now residing offers very little opportunity for observing anything very novel or remarkable in the ornithological way. However, I will briefly sum up what little experiences I have had since we last met (on paper).

During the last two summers I have had a most valuable correspondent in a young friend, Mr Colin M'Vean,[1] who is on Captain Otters' surveying staff working on the outer islands. He was my constant companion in my rambles about Iona and Mull, an island famous for its bygone school of *Ollai Mullach*—wise men of Mull. But all the wise men of Mull of the present age have taken themselves to Canada or elsewhere, so the only college open there now is that celebrated one where students find "tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything," and certainly not least in the auspicious art of observing the flight of birds. In this art we matriculated together, and I place the most implicit reliance on the accuracy of his observations. I had one letter written from St Kilda, where he was for several days, but latterly he was camping out on detached service in a lonesome bay in the Isle of Barra. His descriptions here give one an impression of a kind of Paradise of birds. Lochs studded with ducks and geese innocent of gun-

[1] Colin M'Vean—whose personal friendship the present Editor of these Manuscripts enjoys—son of the Rev. Dr M'Vean of Iona; and who has also largely assisted in reminiscences and Natural History Notes for this volume, as well as illustrations contained in it.—ED.

powder, while quantity is not superior to quality, as his list includes birds which are barely recognised as Scottish. One of these, a male Gadwall, he contrived to send to me (though this was difficult where there was a post only once a month or six weeks). The Stilt, Spoonbill, and Osprey figure, while Eagles seem as common as Sparrows; every house keeps a tame one, and my friend soon had a young Sea Eagle on his staff, which became almost tame, though it resented being poked with an umbrella by breaking the stick in three bits and scattering the silk to the winds.

Loch Potii, Mull

On the 17th January Mr M'Vean writes from the Ross of Mull:—"The only new thing in the bird way is that since we brought our tame geese over to this side (mainland side of Iona Sound) they at once took to Loch Potii, which as usual is frequented by wild-fowl. In a few days they were joined by a White-fronted Goose (I have no doubt whatever as to the species, for I shot one last winter in Iona, and had him stuffed in Edinburgh). This rare bird became quite attached to the tame geese, and came with them to be fed at the window. It was so tame

that I would not shoot it, though I have fired the gun almost over its head without its moving. It remained about three months quite quietly till the loch froze over last week, and the geese were all frozen into it, and had to be released by the *Scarbh*, which has come to end her days in quiet waters; since then the stranger has disappeared, and, I fear, for good."

The *Scarbh*, or *Scart*, is my old boat, in which I did what service I could in the sacred cause. She has since been preserved by my good island friends, on the same principle that the old *Victory* still remains afloat and ataunto in Portsmouth Harbour, with her guns aboard and her flag flying.

Mr M'Vean adds:—"My Eagle is quite reconciled to living on this side the Sound. Though quite at large all day, he returns to roost at night. I spent some time in Ardnamurchan to visit the young laird. I discovered that the Woodcock bred in the district in considerable numbers; from the castle windows every evening I could count a dozen flying about, making a peculiar purring noise. I also visited one of the largest heronries I ever saw. It is on the cliffs at the Point of Ardnamurchan; the rocks are covered with ivy and shrubs, among which the Herons build. It was a pretty sight pulling along the shore to see hundreds of young birds sitting on the ledges, stretching their long necks to look down at us."

A fine male, in perfect plumage, of a Red-crested Pochard (*Fuligula rufina*) was shot in this neighbourhood (Craignish). It was on a fresh-water loch, in company with Widgeon, but without a companion of its own species. It is a beautiful bird; the bright red of bill and legs like coral, the tufted crest and

bay, or bright chestnut, of head and neck, far surpass the Red-headed Pochard (*F. ferina*) in brilliancy of colouring, though there is a sort of general resemblance, which may have occasioned its being sometimes mistaken for it, and so not reported. I had to point out its peculiarities even to some shooting neighbours before they would acknowledge that it was not a Red-headed Pochard. A young relation, on leave from India (Mr Edward Jenkinson), recognised the bird immediately, it being very abundant and giving great sport on the reedy ponds (jheels) in his district (Cawnpore and Benares). It is called by the natives *Tal seer* (Red head).

The skin of the *Rufina* was in perfect condition, and when I showed it to our neighbour, Captain Orde (son of Sir John Orde of Kilmory), who is an arch-birdist, and has a very pretty collection of specimens, which he obtained himself when quartered in North America and other countries, he expressed a wish to take it to London to exhibit at the meeting of the "Ibis" Club.[1] So the illustrious dead was introduced to that assembly. I afterwards begged him to accept of it for his collection, and contented myself with a coloured portrait which I made.

The Common Teal was the only other duck which he recognised among the great variety which India produces. But though shooting ducks is admirable sport, yet the economical plan is to hire a *duckman*, who swims after the ducks with a calabash, or earthen jar, having eye-holes, over his head, and catches them

[1] "British Ornithologists' Union," under whose auspices *The Ibis*, a journal of ornithology, is published quarterly. This bird was exhibited at the meeting of the Zoological Society of London by Mr P. L. Sclater, and an account published in the P. Z. S. 1862, p. 163, and not to the members of the B. O. U.—Ed.

Greylag Geese

by their legs, bringing them ashore alive. Here they are put into a dark hut made of wattles and bushes, with an inch or two of water always running through it, where they are fattened and killed as wanted. The darkness takes away their wildness, and prevents them flapping themselves to death in attempting to escape. The calabash story is of course well known; but I always misdoubted it before.

I make an annual visit to Iona and the parts of Mull I used to frequent, where I never fail to get plenty of all the ordinary kinds of sea fowl. Last spring I went earlier than usual, and got a pair of Grey Geese. I observed a number of the small black Skua, which used to be very seldom seen about the Staffa Islands. On these occasions I take a hamper, which I fill with Scarts, or anything which comes to hand, just before starting home. I had to sail some seven miles in an open boat to overtake the steamer (not the regular summer boat). The water was studded with Scarts, but as it was blowing very fresh at the time it was only possible to shoot those which were right ahead, and pick them up as the boat rushed past; yet with this difficulty I and the surveying friend I mentioned before (Mr Colin M'Vean) bagged thirteen. I am extremely partial to scart soup; it is identical with hare soup. I mention this because in a recent number of the *Times* newspaper there is a very favourable review of a most charming book on Normandy, by a Scotch gentleman residing there, in the style of White's *Natural History of Selbourne* (a lady in Canada asked me if I had ever read Mr Selbourne's "History of the Isle of Wight"!); but the reviewer, though agreeing with the author in everything else, protests against some of his

Norman recipes for cottage cookery, especially that of making savoury meat of *Sea Crows*. I have a mind to send a pair of Phalacracorax to the *Times* office, with a recipe of how to make hare soup *without* first catching your hare.[1]

I have a book on birds, published in 1805, intelligently written, though quaint enough according to our notions, which mentions some instances of the Cuckoo rearing its own young, which I think I ought to transcribe, as a good correspondent, like a good householder, should bring forth things old and new, in case of their being turned to possible account. "The Cuckoo in some parts of England hatches and educates her young, whilst in other parts she builds no nest, but uses that of some other bird. Dr Darwin thus writes:[2]—'As the Rev. Mr Stafford was walking in Glosson Dale, in the Peak of Derbyshire, he saw a Cuckoo rise from its nest. The nest was on the stump of a tree, among some chips that were in part turned grey, so as much to resemble the colour of the bird. In this nest were two young Cuckoos; tying a string about the leg of one of them, he pegged the other end of the string to the ground, and very frequently for many days beheld the old Cuckoo feeding these young ones.' Dr Darwin thus continues from the Rev. Mr Wilmot, of Morley:—'In the beginning of July 1792, I was attending some labourers on my farm, when one of them said to me, "There is a bird's nest on one of the coal-slack hills; the bird is now sitting, and is exactly

[1] Professor Darwin mentions in *The Naturalist's Voyage* to have read that the islanders of the North of Scotland bury the rank carcases of fish-eating birds to render them eatable.—C. W. G. [The Editor has partaken of scart soup, and can fully endorse the above remarks.]

[2] *Zoonomia*, Section XVI. 13, 5, "On Instinct," Vol. I. p. 244, octavo.

like a Cuckoo. They say that Cuckoos never hatch their own eggs, or I could have sworn it was one." He took me to the spot. It was in an open fallow ground: the bird was upon the nest. I stood and observed her some time, and was perfectly satisfied it was a Cuckoo.' The reverend narrator goes on to relate very minute particulars of the pains he took to watch the progress of the incubation. There were three eggs laid among the coal slack, in a nest just scratched out like the hollows in which Plovers deposit their eggs. After some days two young Cuckoos appeared. Mr Wilmot and several of his friends constantly watched the nest until one was fully fledged. . . . Aristotle says the Cuckoo sometimes builds her nest on broken rocks and on high mountains, but adds that she generally possesses herself of the nests of other birds."

XXV.

LITTLEHAMPTON, SUSSEX, *7th October* 1866.

I CAN never hope again to have the opportunities I had while at Iona of personally watching the birds of the West Coast at all seasons of the year. My later visits have been temporary ones, generally in the summer or early autumn, which are the least interesting for that purpose.[1] My late residence at Lochgilphead, though in the same county and admitting

[1] We cannot unhesitatingly endorse this opinion of our author from a naturalist's point of view; and we humbly think that all the seasons have their special interest; so much so, that one can hardly be compared with another, when there is aught at all to observe, as regards their bird-life.—ED.

of very great boating and ordinary shooting privileges, was scarcely a place for good wild fowl shooting; though one could hardly sail on Loch Fyne's broad bosom or sneak along its shores in a punt without seeing something to reward one for the trouble. Still I have not added much to my notes on the wild fowl of the West during my seven or eight years' residence on the margin of Loch Fyne. Where I am at this moment temporarily located, on the shallow, monotonous shore of West Sussex, it is almost an event to see a solitary Herring Gull or a disconsolate Ring Dotterel; but many of the older "long-shore men" possess ponderous old duck guns, and spin tantalising yarns of miraculous flocks of wild fowl, ducks, geese, widgeon, and teal, which used to swarm here before "the marshes was drain'd."

One old coastguardsman, who was stationed at Pagham when Colonel Hawker used to frequent that muddy estuary, has told me many interesting and amusing stories connected with that great sporting oracle of South Britain, which are unpublished. It is a great change conversing with a South Coast trawler after being so long used to the dialect of the Highland fishermen; but the same spirit is in both—when a man has succeeded in shooting his Curlew he is as earnest in the account of how he circumvented *her*, whether he calls the wary bird a "Crauntag or a C'lew."

I see you retain my name as a corresponding member of the society, though, alas! it is a mere honorary distinction now. Rather than not contribute anything at all, I will relate what came under my observation on the 5th October last. Though the Swallow is abundant here, and the Swift very common, we have not many Martins; but on this day I observed an immense

flock congregated on a projecting moulding running under the very projecting eaves of a house immediately opposite to mine. They clustered like bees, two or three deep, scrambling for places, some continually dropping off and taking short flights, and then returning again to try to obtain a precarious footing. A sudden thunderstorm with hail came on in the middle of the day. I heard a noise in the room over where I sat as if somebody was moving about. I went up to ascertain who it was; on opening the door the rustling noise increased, and I immediately saw the cause of it. The room was quite alive with little birds! They fluttered about on the floor, were entangled in the bed and window-curtains; every article of furniture had some perched on it, while the windows were quite filled with them fluttering against the panes in vainly attempting to get through, just as bees and butterflies do in similar circumstances. A little room adjoining was equally swarming. The housemaid coming at my call, held up her hands in dismay at the state of the room—everything covered with feathers and dirt. She was followed by the cat, which made short work of two or three, till she was kicked out, and then we set to work catching the birds and throwing them out of the window. Catching them was quite easy; being all Martins they could not rise readily and merely buzzed about the floor and walls like moths. As they were all perfectly similar, I only killed one to keep as a specimen. They were all young Martins—birds of the year in immature plumage, and small. The window was open, and is just under a projecting roof, under the eaves of which the whole vast army was sheltering from the hail, and which took flight the moment I entered the room; but the large detachment which had

come right in by the window were entraped and could not escape without help. I threw over a hundred through the window.

Two specimens of the Grey Phalarope have recently been secured in this neighbourhood. One I shot myself last week while it was swimming on a pond some six miles inland among the downs; the other was shot the same day, also swimming on a horse pond two miles nearer Littlehampton. These birds are sufficiently rare to be of value to the collector, and both have been carefully preserved. The peculiarity of this little bird is, that though belonging to the order of Waders (*Grallatores*), and otherwise resembling the Sandpipers in appearance and habits, it possesses the power of swimming freely, its feet being partially webbed or lobated.

Both specimens are in their winter plumage, and were performing their annual migration south from their breeding places in Iceland. It was a very unusual place to find them, as they usually frequent the shores, and are sometimes met with in northern latitudes far out at sea, occasionally even out of sight of land. No doubt it was stress of weather that drove them for shelter and rest into such unlikely spots.[1]

On 23rd May, at midnight, as I was preparing for bed, I heard a tapping at the window where I sat with a light; on its being repeated I opened the sash and in flew a little bird, which I found was a White-throat. I kept him all night and released him in the morning.

Last winter a Richardson's Skua was brought to me alive, captured by a crew of French fishermen in whose boat it alighted.

[1] I once shot one at about the same time of year on the Lake of Neuchatel, in Switzerland, showing that they also travel by an overland route.—Note by Chas. W. Graham.

A little before, a fine Osprey was shot sitting on a clothes-pole devouring a freshly caught fish. In summer, also, a Spotted Crake was knocked down near here by a man with a stick. Such shreds and patches, crumbs of comfort, is all I have to support ornithological life upon.

As nothing is too mean for the notice of a Naturalist, I may mention an observation on the Common House Fly. In the South their wings when folded are still slightly opened, furcated, or dove-tailed, and they are very annoying, alighting on one's face and hands, especially when one is in bed in the early summer mornings; but in Iona the House Fly is much smaller, and the wings shut together quite close over the back; and, moreover, though they dance aerial quadrilles inside one's bed curtains, yet they never annoy, tickle, bite, or alight upon one's nose, face, or hands, like their bigger brethren of the South, or, still worse, those of Canada, where they are a perfect Egyptian plague indoors, as musquitos are out of doors.[1]

XXVI.

LITTLEHAMPTON, SUSSEX, *2nd May* 1867.

BEING required to write about the Hebrides from Sussex is like being asked to sing a pleasant song in a strange land; however, I have kept my promise and here are my notes, though they are

[1] In other parts of the West of Scotland known to us the Common House Fly is a perfect pest in July and August, especially by certain river banks when one is salmon-fishing.—ED.

in fact nothing more than shooting reminiscences, probably more amusing to the writer than edifying to the reader. I have commenced systematically as you requested; the only objection to such an arrangement being that it forces me to begin with the land birds, whereas as my field of observation, the Lower Hebrides, to which my notes apply, consists of very little land surrounded by a great deal of water, my experience, as well as tastes, would lead me to give the *wet birds* the preference to the *dry birds.* However, with the following "bald, disjointed chat," I get through all the Eagle and Hawk tribe, and so wash my hands of them. The list of the little dicky-bird tribe is but short, for as for those sylvan warblers which frequent woods and bowers we had none of them. Those we had were such as could rough it in a rock or scrubby bush and pay for their board and lodging with a song. Having run through the birds of prey and the small land birds, I continue with the Wading and Water Fowl, and am glad to get into salt water again. I rather neglected our little land birds, and indeed the young companion of my shooting excursions thought it an amiable weakness of mine to take any notice at all of such "small deer."

The number of Kingfishers here is worthy of remark. They frequent the marshes and inundated pastures through the winter and live solitary.

On the 18th February the Thrush was singing blithely under the full moon at about 11 P.M. The Cuckoo and Nightingale were heard here on the 18th March, and the Swallow arrived on the 19th March. These are the only notes this barren soil affords, and with them I conclude.

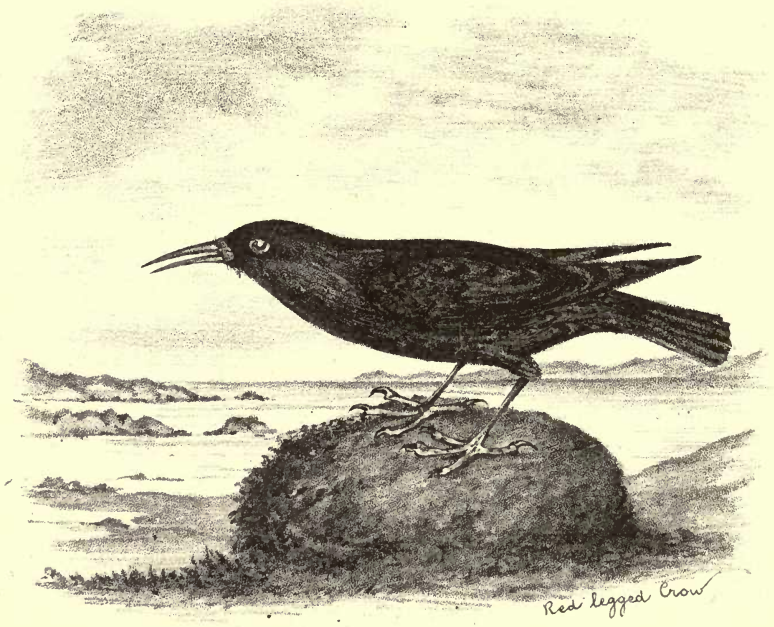
XXVII.

IONA, *November* 4, 1850.

MY DEAR MOTHER,—I send you a pair of magpies as an addition to the bird book. I hope they will arrive safe, and I would be obliged to you if you would stick them in. I got my father's letter saying that the goose came safe, and that he was going to Paris with Car. You must keep a vacancy open in the bird book for a splendid fellow which I captured this morning, and I am now taking his portrait. Poor fellow! first he is to be drawn by me, and then by the cook. I will show him off in a plate, she will serve him up in a dish; his likeness will exercise my palette, while his carcase (roasted, and well stuffed with onions) will gratify our palates. This illustrious stranger is a greylag goose—a bird peculiar to the Hebrides. I once got one before, but have not had his picture yet; it is very different from the bernacle goose. This morning I awoke by hearing Colin (who has got a hawk's eye for birds) shouting, "See the goose! see the wild goose!" In exactly one minute and thirty seconds I had my clothes on, and, gun in hand, I was out. The goose had come and alighted along with our tame geese about thirty yards from my window. The tame geese, however, drove the stranger off immediately; Colin and I set off after him. It has been blowing a gale here for five days, and to-day was tremendous. We at last overtook our friend in an open cornfield, where we could not approach him, so we watched till he went to some broken ground, then I stalked him carefully. I went to windward of him, because the wind was so powerful that the shot would not have carried so far against it, and in such a case it is

much easier to see as well as to shoot with your back to the wind. At last, after creeping a good distance, I suddenly popped up from behind the last bank, and found myself within forty yards of massa goose. He instantly rose into the air—bang!—with a loud cackle he tumbled over and over, and there was my beautiful greylag goose. I would sooner get him than half-a-dozen bernacles, as they are much rarer. I am afraid you won't be much edified with this essay upon goose-shooting; but then, only think, a greylag goose! How delightful! It's enough to make one cackle with delight.[1]

[1] The above is illustrated at page 176, the bird there represented being undoubtedly a greylag goose. Mr Graham has taken artist's licence, however, by introducing other examples also.—ED.



EXTRACTS FROM DIARIES, &c.

EXTRACTS FROM DIARIES WRITTEN IN IONA,

INCLUDING THE "WALK THROUGH GLENMORE, IN MULL."

1849.—*July* 31*st.*—Went to Soay island. Three stormy petrels. Letter to Mr ——.

August 2*nd.*—Sent petrel to Sir W. Jardine.

4*th.*—Shot at Calva island.

7*th.*—Walked to Lunig. Lowered myself by a long rope off Siel island to get an owl's nest.

15*th.*—Drew some tombstones.

16*th.*—Shot six sanderlings.

17*th.*—Shot rook—a *rara avis* here.

27*th.*—To Staffa with Mr Baker of Norfolk; he sketched while I shot scarts.

31*st.*—Sailed about Island of Storms. Shot a scart and guillemot.

September 6*th.*—Picnicked on top of Staffa.

October 4*th.*—Launched the 'Scarbh;' put some oatcake and three leeks into the bag. There was already one *leak* in the boat, which I got by running into the 'Breadalbane's' anchor the other day. Took Dash and the two *dodaigs;* landed Mr M'Vean over the ferry, and then about four P.M. sailed out of the Sound. Had a stiff breeze running along the south coast of Mull; let fly the sheet two or three times; night overtook me as I passed Lochbuie, and the wind fell light and baffling. As I got fairly into the Sound of Mull, the moon rose; tide was setting me south, the wind was variable, and there were passing squalls of wind and hail. The night looked wild, and I was afraid of the moon becoming obscured, so I determined to stand across the Sound at once, and take my chance of what land I should make. Soon after midnight, as far as I could guess, I approached an island, where I determined to wait till daylight, as I saw a bad squall coming up. After coasting a little way round the lee side of the island, I went into a little bay, where, to my delight, I found a lobster-box anchored in the middle; so I moored the boat to the box, took down the mast, spread the sail over the stern-sheets, and, creeping beneath it, I wrapped myself up in my plaid, with my three dogs round me. The night was squally, and I heard the tide roaring, but the boat lay very snug, and I slept pretty well, in spite of its being

rather cold, for, indeed, there was ice in the boat next morning.

5*th*.—Soon after daylight, got up, put the boat in order; breakfasted on my three leeks and oatcake, then hauled the boat

to the shore, and landed to search for water; found some, and a quantity of blackberries; followed a path which led up to a small house; the good man quite astounded at seeing a stranger on his island at that time of day, and still more so when I told

him that I had left Iona last night. He informed me I was on the island of Garveloch, five or six miles off the coast of Lorn, and he was the tenant and sole inhabitant, except his wife and family. I received a huge basin of crowdie, and in return gave a bit of tobacco, which the man seized with such avidity as showed that it was a rare commodity to this "Family Robinson." About seven o'clock embarked, steering north. When I had left the island, I observed a furious rapid about half a mile S.E. of the island, which was what I had heard roaring so loud during the night. Wind died away, and a dead calm came on, the tide against me. Landed at Easdail island about twelve; bought a pennyworth of bacca, and smoked it. Landed at Ardnacaple, island of Seil, and smoked a pipe and let a heavy shower pass. At last reached Loch Feochain at three or four o'clock, having pulled against a foul tide since sunrise. Found Mr and Mrs M'Vean with Colin M'Vean. They were much astounded at seeing me.

6*th*.—At three A.M., a bright moonlight morning. Down to the beach and launch 'Scarbh;' hard frost, boat crusted with ice; had to take off shoes and stockings and wade in above the knees to get the boat afloat. Pulled away with boy Angus to Oban; got there before seven; hoisted the 'Scarbh' on board the 'Dolphin.' Mr and Mrs M'Vean arrived by gig; embarked in the 'Dolphin,' and at noon got to Iona.

13*th*.—Went in big boat to Soay island with Colin, M'Millan, and Niel and Angus, the servants; had a potato picnic, and dug up stormy petrels; had a stiff pull home.

1850.—*January* 19*th*.—Drew a golden plover, a heron, and

a "scarbh." Shot three couples of golden plover and a few grey guillemots.

26*th.*—Shot red-legged gull, and sent it to Edinburgh to be stuffed.

February 2*nd.*—Drew loon.

9*th.*—To Fiddra in 'Scarbh' to shoot ducks. Saw flocks of three dozen bernacle geese. Shot pigeon, hoody crow, and gulls.

16*th.*—Drew hoody crow, comparative table of gulls' bills, legs, and quills, and a sketch of Ardfinaig.

17*th.*—Shot a ring-dotterel, gillebride (oyster-catcher).

23*rd.*—Drew map of Mull and of Iona. Shot curlew, ring-dotterel, redshank, puffin.

March 2*nd.*—Shot buzzard at Tunisnaleuth.

3*rd.*—Drew buzzard, diver or loon, great northern diver for Mr Wood of Richmond, Yorkshire.

June 15*th.*—Sailed all round the islets to collect eggs, chiefly terns and kittiwakes; nine dozen eggs

July 22*nd.*—Mr Keddie's visit; botanising with him; picnic to Staffa; fine sport.

June ——.—Became acquainted with two ornithological gents from Glasgow—Mr Kemp and Mr Gibb.[1] They had shot a shearwater. Promised to send them some stormy petrels.

[1] Mr John Gibb, merchant, Glasgow, died in March 1885. Mr John Kemp, born in 1775, attained the great age of 100 years. He was the most faithful and dear friend and companion of Mr Gibb in all their wild sports together. Both these gentlemen were enthusiasts in field sports and athletic exercises, and were naturalists of no mean capacity. They were well-known Scottish sportsmen of their time, and from the records in our possession it appears that scarcely a Hebridean, Orkney, or Shetland island had remained unvisited by them, both in summer and winter. We have not been able to trace, however, as yet any literary remains from the pens of either sportsman, though such would, if they do exist,

July 6th.—Fell in with a party of shieldrakes while sailing across the Sound. I immediately shot one old one, and chased a flock of unfledged ones for two miles, but they escaped me by their active diving. An old one kept flying about and attempting to divert my attention, but I did not fire at her.

13th.—Wrote some papers for Mr Keddie's new guide-book.[1]

9th.—To Soay island; dug up stormy petrels to send to Mr Kemp and Mr Gibb of Glasgow; kept eggs for myself.

13th.—Mrs M'Vean and all the children went in the 'Scarbh,' with the 'Loo-soo' towing astern, laden with our basket, kettle, jugs, &c., to Eilean-na-Slat, at the entrance to Iona Sound. It created much amusement on board the steamer which passed us, as we were sailing along with all the sails set and flags flying, and the queer-looking 'Loo-soo' in our wake.

15th.—M'Millan and I sailed to Staffa and spent the whole day, which was fine and calm there. We did not land much, but went round the island in the boat, poking into every cave. We got more birds than one man could well carry up to the house. Back at eleven P.M. This week I sent off large drawing of west side of St Martin's Cross to Mr Keddie.

27th.—The beginning of this week wet and stormy. Commenced chalk drawing. Collecting seaweeds. There are very few birds about now, nothing to be met with but gillebride or oyster-catchers. At Fiddra there are flocks of curlew beginning to collect, but very wild.

almost without doubt prove of much interest. There are obituary notices in the newspapers of October 1875, the time of Mr Kemp's death being the 26th of that month. We are indebted to Mr D. A. Boyd for the above, and fuller particulars.—ED.

[1] Glasgow: Maclure & Macdonald.—ED.

Glenmore

WALK THROUGH GLENMORE.

1853.—*November.*—This trip was in October, towards the latter end, when the weather began to break up. It was a delightful sunny day that I started about noon from Bunessan, with my knapsack and plaid, with the intention of walking across Mull. At five, had dinner at the little inn at Kinloch, *egad ain agus potat* (herrings and potatoes), and a drap o' the craytur; then off again, and when the grey dusk of night was beginning to creep o'er the mountains, I passed under the foot of giant Ben Mòr, and entered the gloomy black gorge of Glenmore, the great glen of Mull. It now became intensely dark, so I sat down to wait for the moon to rise. Not a sound was to be heard in this desolate region, except the tinkling of the mountain rills, and the soft sighing of the night wind as it stole round the slopes of the hill and across the moor, though so gently as scarcely to shake the heather-bells or to make the white cotton moss bend its head. Presently the full moon rose up into the clear blue frosty sky, high above the mountain peaks, which were silvered in her beams. The winding river and chain of lakelets far down at the bottom of the glen glistened with her rays, and even the road itself looked like a river of light curling along the mountain side. I walked for several hours under this radiant moon till I came, at about eleven o'clock, to a place called Ardjura, a wooded glen, through the bottom of which runs a broad river. Here I was suddenly startled by hearing an extraordinary noise, like that of a person in the agonies of death, which seemed to proceed from

the copse by the roadside. I stopped and listened, when suddenly there burst from every side a roaring like that of a number of bulls, only a much harsher, more quavering noise, more like a howl. Now it sounded from the dark cover close at hand, awakening all the echoes of the valley, and then was answered from the shoulder of the mountain in a long bray, which rang upon the clear, still night air, and died away in a lugubrious groan.

Doran and I quaked, expecting every moment to see a *rabble route* of fire-fanged, brazen-lunged demons rush across our road, which here, over-reached by boughs partially obstructing the moonlight, seemed tesselated with ivory and ebony.

The noise continued without intermission, and the trampling, cracklings of twigs, and occasional coughings of some creatures close at hand among the brake, seemed to be coming closer. Just as I was about to invoke St Columba's aid, and to vow a vast number of tapers to be burnt at his shrine, I recollected that this part of Mull was very much frequented by the wild red deer, and that this was the time of year that the stags begin *belling* or braying, when the antlered chief of the herd,

> " . . . Through all his lusty veins,
> The bull, deep-scorch'd, the raging passion feels.
> He seeks the fight; and, idly butting, feigns
> His rival gored in every knotty trunk.
> Him should he meet, the bellowing war begins."

The very deep roar from the shoulder of the hill proclaimed "a noble hart of grace" descending the brae-side to dispute the chieftainship of the corrie with the stags of less degree.

Before I got near to the entrance of the great glen on the

return journey it was nearly three o'clock. The morning, from being very bright, had gradually overcast, blackened, and now assumed a most threatening aspect; the inky-coloured clouds hung upon the tops of the mountains, and seemed to be charged with pitch. The wind was very slight, but it wailed and sobbed through the mountain gullies, and moaned in irregular gusts over the grey lichen-covered rocks in that peculiarly wild, melancholy manner which forebodes a dreadful storm. I hurried on as fast as I could, for I had many miles to walk through

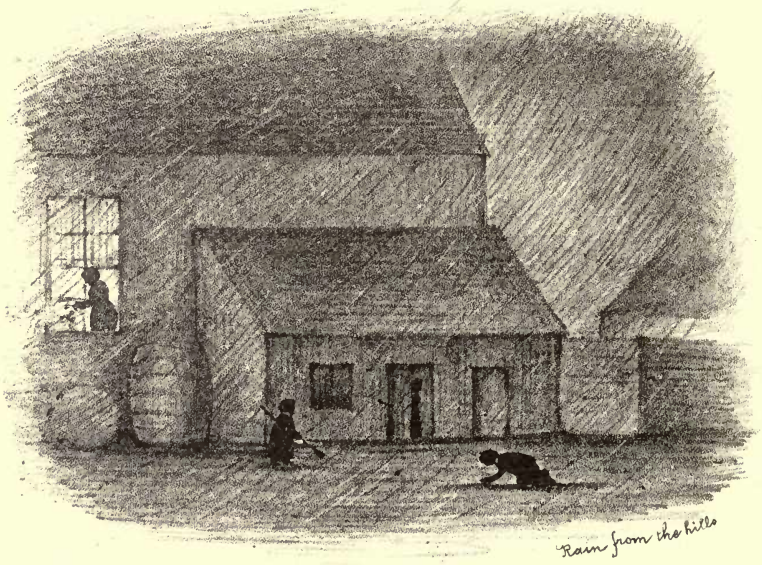
> "This sullen land of lakes and fens immense;
> Of rocks, resounding torrents, gloomy heaths,
> And cruel deserts black with treach'rous bogs;"

for I wished to reach the fords lest the coming rains should make the rivers impassable, and before the darkness of the evening, which was already closing in with unusual swiftness, would make the fords dangerous. The clouds now came rolling down the slopes of the mountains, till everything was obscured from sight by their pall of blackness. A sudden, sharp blast of wind flew across the moor; and immediately it was calm again; the ends of my plaid fluttered heavily, once or twice streaming out before me. Doran, with tail and ears down, ran close up to my heels, and in a moment, with a crash like thunder, the storm burst upon us. The irresistible fury of the wind hurried me along the road as it rushed past, now roaring at my ear, and now howling and shrieking as it whirled along the valley. The river and lake foamed and boiled, and then rose up in circling eddies of spray, like wreaths of smoke, filling the air as the blast bore it away up the sides of the hill. The rain poured down in hissing

sheets of water, deluging the whole face of the country; the road was covered with water, and every rivulet was swollen into a fierce torrent, bearing stones, and earth, and peat along with its turbid, coffee-coloured waters. Add to all this the night soon set in intensely dark. I hurried on, assisted by the storm on my back, till at length I came to the rivers, which, happily, were still fordable, though sufficiently deep and rapid, and every moment

becoming worse. After this the rain became heavier than I think I ever saw it before (unless in the tropics during the rainy season); it was difficult to keep the road in consequence of the darkness, but the hollow rumbling of the water pouring into the bog holes by the roadside gave warning of the danger of a false step. Happily the twinkling light from the window of Kinloch Inn was now glimmering through the darkness and storm across the head of Loch Scridain, and after a vigorous push for about a

mile, crossing a narrow footbridge formed of two planks (which I had to do on all fours), and fording another bad torrent, I at length ran my nose up against the gable of the house, and, after groping along to reach the door, I next found myself steaming before a huge fire of blazing peats roaring up the chimney, which quickly dried the Iona tartans, and made the outward man all that was comfortable, while broiled herrings, potatoes, and tea did for the inner; and then with a hot tumbler, a pipe, and feet on the mantelpiece, Doran and I listened as the casement rattled, the chimney rumbled, and the storm battered against the gable of the little *rattle-trap* shanty of an inn, feeling thankful that we were housed on such a night as one would not wish one's enemy's dog to be out in.



NOTES FROM MINUTE-BOOKS OF THE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY OF GLASGOW, &c.[1]

6*th January* 1852.—Mr H. D. Graham of Iona elected a Corresponding Member.

(*Copy Letter from Mr Graham to Secretary.*)

"Iona, *January* 16*th.*

"Sir,—I write to thank you very cordially for your obliging letter, which I received by the last post, accompanying the diploma of the Glasgow Natural History Society. I was delighted by the receipt of the last, and I hope to derive much pleasure and advantage from the connection.

"I beg through you, sir, to return my best thanks to that Society for the honour it has thus done me in electing me a member.—I remain, sir, yours truly, H. D. Graham."

[1] Communicated to the Editor by the courtesy of D. A. Boyd, Esq., Secretary of the Glasgow Natural History Society.

6*th April* 1852.—A paper was read by Mr Robert Gray from H. D. Graham, Esq., Iona, "On the habits of the ice duck (*Harelda glacialis*)," illustrated by specimens and drawings.

1*st June* 1852.—Mr Robert Gray read a paper from H. D. Graham, Esq., of Iona, upon the rock pigeon. On the motion of Mr Gourlie, Mr Gray was requested to transmit the thanks of the Society to Mr Graham for his interesting communication.

5*th October* 1852.—Mr Robert Gray exhibited a specimen of the stormy petrel, and read a letter from Henry D. Graham, Esq., of Iona, descriptive of its habits.

7*th December* 1852.—The following communications from Corresponding Members were then read, viz.:— . . . "On the habits of the black guillemot (*Uria grylle*)," by H. D. Graham, Esq., Iona. Communicated by Mr Robert Gray.

4*th January* 1853.—Mr Robert Gray read two very interesting letters from Henry D. Graham, Esq., Iona.

1*st February* 1853.—Mr Robert Gray read two letters from H. D. Graham, Esq., of Iona.

3*rd May* 1853.—Mr Robert Gray read a paper by Mr Graham of Iona, "On the habits of the cormorant."

28*th February* 1860.—The secretary read a letter from one of the Corresponding Members—Mr Henry D. Graham, of Ardrishaig—descriptive of the appearance of wild-fowl in immense abundance during the present winter on the shores of Loch Gair.

26*th May* 1860.—A communication was read from Mr Henry D. Graham, of Ardrishaig, containing many ornithological notices of great interest for the months of April and May. The species chiefly commented upon were the great northern diver (*Colymbus glacialis*), the Sclavonian grebe (*Podiceps cornutus*), the golden eye (*Clangula vulgaris*), and the various tringæ found on the shores in the neighbourhood of his residence.

27*th January* 1863.—The secretary read a communication from Henry D. Graham, Esq., Lochgilphead, one of the Society's Corresponding Members, in which he mentioned, as interesting additions to the ornithology of the West of Scotland, the occurrence of the gadwall (*Querquedula strepera*) on one of the Outer Hebrides, and the red-crested whistling-duck (*Fuligula rufina*) near his own residence. He also made the announcement of having seen the harp seal (*Phoca grænlandica*, Müller) at the island of Jura.

24th February 1863.—The secretary then read a paper "On the occurrence of the harp seal (*Phoca grænlandica*) in Loch Tarbert, Jura, with remarks on the habits of some other species frequenting the western islands," by Henry D. Graham, Esq., Lochgilphead, Corresponding Member. Mr Graham had seen three of these rare visitors to British waters in the above-mentioned locality while exploring the loch in company with a friend. The seals were observed among a herd of the common species occupying a series of shelving rocks about 300 or 400 yards off shore. One of the keepers who was of the party having an excellent telescope used in stalking deer, Mr Graham and his friends could distinctly make out the markings which characterise the harp seal; and as the animals remained in full view for three hours, constantly watched, the utmost care was taken to note down the necessary particulars for after discrimination. Since observing the animals, Mr Graham, after repeated inquiries, satisfied himself of at least other three authentic cases of the capture of *white* seals of extraordinary size, one of these occurring in Loch Scridian, Mull, under the observation of Mr M'Kinnon; and as a result of these inquiries he had besides acquired some highly interesting information respecting the larger species of seal to be found on the outer islands. These he communicated in his excellent paper, from which it would appear that, under the name of *tapvaist* or *tabeist*, the islanders are familiar with at least three different species attaining a large size. Last spring he had received from a friend—a native of the Hebrides—the skin of a recently killed young seal of about a month old. It was a pure white, and measured four feet in length without the flippers. This skin was accompanied by a few notes, stating that the species was well known, and that in an adult state it is seven or eight feet long, the body being fully thicker than a herring barrel. The female has her young in November, and it is found three or four yards above high-water mark, sometimes quite among the ferns and heather. The young do not take to the water till six weeks old, when they weigh 70 or 80 lb. If disturbed, however, the old one will make off with her calf, which she does by taking it upon her back, and so plunging into the sea. Even after a long dive, on rising to the surface the young one remains securely on its mother's back. She comes to suckle it regularly at high water; but her instinct teaches her to choose such spots as render it impossible for any one either to approach or lay in wait for them with-

out being seen or scented.[1] Mr Graham observed that the description of the markings of this white seal agreed exactly with that of the harp seal, which is not likely to be mistaken, at least in the adult state, for any other British species; but at the same time he expressed his belief that among the islanders generally there were three large seals confounded with each other—the grey seal (*Halichœrus gryphus*), the great seal (*Phoca barbata*), and the Greenland seal (*P. grœnlandica* of Müller).

Mr Gray also communicated some facts of interest in connection with the cormorant and oyster-catcher, selected from Mr Graham's correspondence.

7th January 1868.—The secretary then read a paper "On the birds of Iona and Mull," by Henry D. Graham, Esq., Corresponding Member.

28th January 1868.—The following papers were then read:— . . . I. "On the birds of Iona and Mull," by Henry D. Graham, Esq., Corresponding Member.

31st March 1868.—The following papers were then read:— . . . II. "On the birds of Iona and Mull," by Henry D. Graham, Esq., Corresponding Member.

26th May 1868.—A communication "On the birds of Iona and Mull," by Henry D. Graham, Esq., Corresponding Member, was then read.

24th February 1874.—Before proceeding with the business on the card, the secretary read a communication from Mr Robert Gray, calling attention to the death of Mr Henry Davenport Graham, one of the earliest Corresponding Members. Mr Graham joined the Society in 1852, and since that time many contributions from him have been read at the meetings, and these were much appreciated for their accuracy and freshness. Mr Graham was one of the few writers on birds who combined the strictest correctness with a strong poetic feeling, all his communications showing a high admiration for nature in her various moods, and a deep insight into bird-life, as observed by him in the Inner Hebrides. Mr Graham's chief contributions to the Proceedings of the Society were forwarded from Iona, where he lived for many years. He had during his residence on that island made drawings of all the birds he had obtained there and in Mull, and from

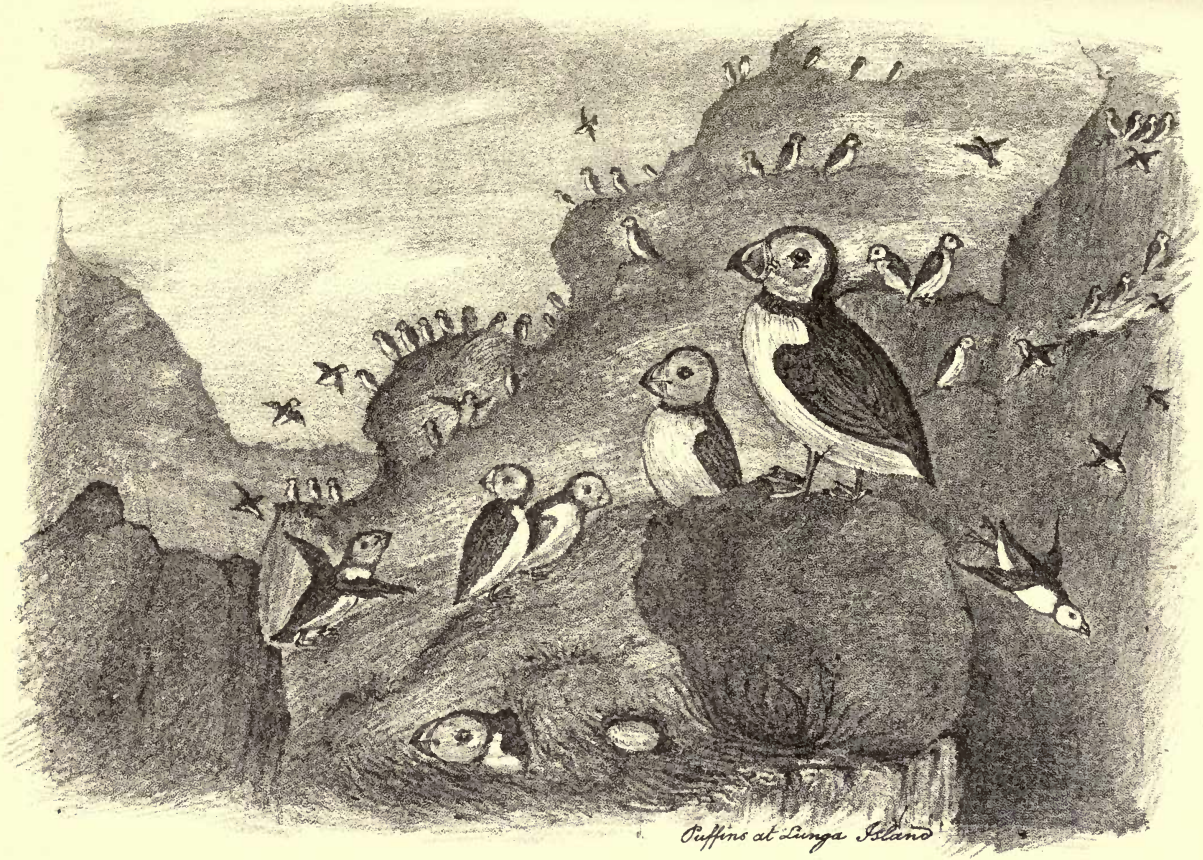
[1] This account appears almost in duplicate in Letter XXIII. (*vide* p. 167).—Ed.

these, and materials in his possession, Mr Gray intimated his intention of bringing out a memorial volume, containing all that Mr Graham had written on the birds of Iona and Mull for the last twenty years. On the motion of the chairman, it was unanimously agreed to record in the minutes an expression of the regret with which the members had heard of the death of Mr Graham, of whose interesting contributions to the Society's Proceedings many of them retain a pleasing and vivid remembrance.

Memorandum.—November 1888.—"I have searched the accumulated papers, correspondence, &c., in my hands, but have been unable to find any MSS. or documents relating to Mr Graham's communications to the Society, with the single exception of the letter dated January 16 [1852]. It seems highly probable, therefore, that all correspondence and other papers were collected by Mr Gray, and set apart for the preparation of the memorial volume referred to in the minute of meeting of 24th February 1874—a work which he did not accomplish. Unless the MSS. were returned to Mr Graham, and retained among his private papers, or sent for publication elsewhere, I cannot account for their absence both from the repositories of the Society and from the documents collected by Mr Gray for the preparation of the memoir.

"I regret that I have been unable to obtain any evidence regarding the publication, in any Journal or Transactions, of any of the communications read before the Natural History Society of Glasgow, but which were not printed in its Proceedings.[1] D. A. B."

[1] Some of the Letters, as has already been stated, appeared in successive numbers of Morris' *Naturalist*, and are reprinted in the present volume of Mr Graham's writings.—Ed.



Puffins at Lunga Island

THE BIRDS OF IONA AND MULL.

THE BIRDS OF IONA AND MULL.

The Golden Eagle.

Eagles are much less numerous now than they appear to have been a generation ago, judging from the numerous deserted eyries which have been pointed out to me by the older natives, among the precipitous cliffs of the south and west coast of Mull, as having been once tenanted yearly by pairs of eagles. The increased number of guns, and the ruthless war waged by shepherds against the larger birds of prey in these later days, sufficiently account for their disappearance, as sheep-farming extends into the districts once left to solitude and them. Still an occasional eagle may be seen pursuing his lofty course over the moors and mountains of Mull and the surrounding islands. A friend, a few years ago, killed one out of a party of seven, a number which would have been thought deeply significant in the days when augury was a fashionable science. In Jura a pair flew close over my head as I, with a friend and a gamekeeper, were lunching, with our arms piled at a little distance. As we took them for herons, which are very numerous there, we made no attempt to demolish them, till they sailed slowly past without deigning to notice us, leaving us gazing after them open-mouthed.

The White-tailed or Sea Eagle.

Gaelic, Iolair.

"Iolair-shuil na grèin," the eagle eye of the sun.—Ossian's *Temora*.

The same remarks apply to the sea eagle as to the last. Though not an unusual sight to see an eagle flying in the heavens, I never had

opportunities of becoming familiar with either kind. We always supposed that they held their royal court and had their nurseries in the isle of Skye, whose lofty peaks form part of the marine panorama on our northern horizon. My friend M'Vean has had a tamed one for some years, which is not kept in confinement, but sometimes startles strangers by swooping past the windows. He says—"My eagle I named Ronival, after the hill in South Uist where he was hatched. He is a male, and a very fine bird. I have had him now for four years, and he has assumed his white tail. He is allowed to fly about at large, but is not fond of going far, and will always come at the call of the kitchen-maid who feeds him, and for whom he shows the greatest affection, and who can manage him even when in most ungovernable tempers. He has a particular aversion to small boys, and will fly at one going near him. The only animal he is afraid of is the pig, and to hear a pig grunt is enough to make him fly off, even if it should not be in sight. A well-dressed friend ventured one day to touch him with the point of his fashionable light umbrella, which so offended Ronival's majesty that he flew at the offending instrument and literally smashed it, breaking the stick and tearing the silk to tatters, the owner gladly escaping in unscathed broadcloth himself, at the expense of leaving his pet *parapluie* a *spolia opima* in the claws of Jove's irate bird. Usually, however, he is affable enough, and does no more mischief than occasionally killing a hen or two if his own dinner is not served up punctually enough; and this is really great forbearance, considering he actually lives at large in a poultry yard. This proves how very domestic this monarch of the cliffs may become, that though a short-winged flight would carry him to the illimitable freedom of the neighbouring sea cliffs and mountain tops, he has never been known to 'stop out of nights' more than once or twice during several years' residence."

The Peregrine.

Is frequently seen along the coast hunting for ducks, rock pigeons, and sea gulls (if they were not flying over the water), but I never discovered any nesting place, though I have seen the old birds hunting at the time of the year when they might be supposed to have nestlings. The presence of a peregrine is often announced by an unusual clamour

among the hoodie crows, who leave their search for shell-fish, &c., among the rocks, to follow the nobler rogue with their vulgar uproar, and as the word is passed along the beach, the mob increases in numbers and audacity till the falcon is fairly rabbled out of their district. A peregrine who had just struck a red-legged crow was thus assailed and so distracted by their unusual pertinacity (probably on account of the red-leg being one of their cloth), that I walked up and shot him in mid-air, holding his prey in one claw, while the other was held ready to give the death-blow to any assailant should he venture within reach of his grip, which they took very good care not to do. Colquhoun, in his *Moor and Loch*, mentions seeing a peregrine's nest on the Bass Rock; and St John, in his *Tour in Sutherlandshire*, states that he got some eggs at Inchnadamph. He also adds, *apropos* of eggs, the following pertinent remarks (page 14):—

"I found that all the shepherds, gamekeepers, and others in this remote part of the kingdom had already ascertained the value of this and other rare birds' eggs, and were as eager to search for them, and as loth to part with them (excepting at a very high price) as love of gain could make them, nor had they the least scruple in endeavouring to impose eggs under fictitious names on any person wishing to purchase such things. Indeed, I am very sure that many of the eggs sold by London dealers are acquired in this way, and are not in the least to be depended on as to their identity."

The Kestrel.

This is by far the most abundant of the hawk tribe with us. Its nest may be found in almost every precipitous sea cliff, which is tenanted year after year if undisturbed. One pair made their nest among the old cathedral ruins of Iona, whose tower is peopled all the year round by a colony of jackdaws; and that these jealous republicans allowed them to do so is proof enough that they had nothing to apprehend either on their own account or on that of their nestlings. It is generally admitted that the kestrel does more good than harm, preying upon mice and not destroying game: it is a pity therefore that ignorant gamekeepers persist in destroying it, for the "windhover" poised in the air as if nailed against the sky is a rural sight dear to our boyhood, and not unnoticed by the poets. The young kestrel

reared from the nest becomes a very familiar pet, and may be permitted to fly about at large, as it will not fly away far, and will come at call and catch small pieces of raw flesh thrown up in the air. I have seen the kestrel hawking for worms over a newly-ploughed field; he alights to devour one and then resumes his search, hovering a few yards above the ground very perseveringly.

The Merlin.

This active little hawk is nearly as numerous as the last. Hunting along the rocky shores and skimming with inconceivable swiftness over the level fields, rising and falling as he tops a stone dyke with a *whirr!* his stiff pinions vibrating in the air. The nest is not nearly so often met with as the kestrel's. When resting perched on an overhanging rock, the merlin often betrays its presence by setting up a querulous cry, half scream, half chatter, and continues scolding till the object that excites it—a boat or passer-by—has come within easy gunshot.

The Common Buzzard.

Seems to be extremely rare. I only obtained two specimens; one was in the rockiest part of Iona.

The Sparrow Hawk.

The *Gaelic* for hawk is seabhag (pronounced she'ag); the smaller hawks are generally called *sperrak*, which I thought to be a corruption of the English sparrow hawk, till I found that it was derived from the word *spèir*, a claw, and should be written speir-sheabhag or speir àg.

Is as rare as the last, or nearly so. It may be more frequent on the mainland side of Mull, where there are some plantations and trees; but we must remember that this is where Dr Johnson told Boswell to take good care of his staff, for he perceived that timber was very scarce here.

The Common Harrier.

The harrier is common, except at breeding time, when he probably retires to the inland hills; at all other times he may be met with hunting along the low land skirting the shores. I have observed that one will sometimes take the same line of country for several days, following the same course, and about the same hour. Acting upon this observation I have waylaid them, or rather put myself in the expected line of flight, as no strategy is necessary, and have been more than once rewarded by so cutting off the depradator of chicken yards, or at least of seeing him go by. The *ring-tail*, or white rump, which gives name to the female, is a very conspicuous feature as she flies past. She gives the idea of a much heavier bird than the male. The male is a very pretty bird, and is commonly called here the white hawk. One windy day I let one pass me on the sea-shore, mistaking it for a sea-gull; a number of the small common gulls were flying and hovering about, and the colour of the plumage and black-tipped wings were so similar, that only the different mode of flight suddenly awakened me to the fact that I had allowed a "white hawk" to escape.

The White Owl.

A stray specimen is seen or shot from time to time on the mainland of Mull. Though we have a venerable ruined belfry and a moon in Iona, we have no owl to live in the one, or "mope her melancholy" at the other; but we kept one, captured in Mull, for some time in the garden, which became pretty tame, and afforded some amusement by the consternation his presence occasioned to the small birds, though he lived in the seclusion and shade of a thick bush.[1]

The Short-eared Owl.

Is found among the long heather on the moors of Mull, but I never got its nest.

[1] The nearest place I have found the white owl's nesting place was a hole in the haunch of the one-arched bridge which connects the island of Saog'hail (the world) with the mainland of Lorn and the rest of the world!

The Snowy Owl.

Gaelic, Cailleach oidhche—the old woman of the night, though Armstrong says it should be *coileach* oidhche—cock of the night (*dh* is mute).

I never saw this owl in Scotland, though I have since in Canada; but a very old sportsman, whom I have long been acquainted with, and whose correctness I can rely on, described to me "a large, perfectly white owl" flying about the open, flat sandy extremity of Iona by daylight, apparently hunting for rabbits. This was a good many years ago, and after some very stormy weather. He had never seen anything like it before, either in Argyll or Perth shires, in the course of half a century's shooting. Others also saw it, and I think my friend the minister of Iona told me he had seen it himself, but I will inquire of him if it was so.

The Water Ousel.

Gaelic, Lon uisge—water blackbird.

Is common in the burns of Mull at all times.

The Fieldfare.

Is an unusual winter visitant, only driven to our shores by hard weather. The arrival of a flock was announced to me by an old shepherd, who declared he had seen "a number of birds like starlings; they were starlings indeed, but that they must be very old ones, for they were *hoary* with age!" This is one instance of the readiness with which such men leading an out-of-door life observe anything unusual in the way of birds or any other appearance of nature which may cross their path, though not directly connected with their own daily avocations, nor personally interesting to themselves. I have always trusted to shepherds, fishermen, and such men, detecting the advent of a stranger of this kind, and of willingly giving all the information that may be required, if you keep on easy speaking terms with them. They readily enter into your enthusiasm on the subject, and consider it a sort of honour to their beat or district to have a rarity captured upon it.[1]

[1] Quite true; but whilst on the one hand it is often difficult for a "humble inquirer after truth," who is not intimately acquainted with the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of the Celt, to distinguish between the true and the untrue, or to get at the facts of the case, it must be remembered also that the "imparted

The Red Wing.

The red wing visits us fitfully in winter during hard weather, and shelter themselves among the little glens and hollows of the hills.

The Song Thrush.

Gaelic, Smeòrach. Smeòr is to anoint, to grease—probably from the smoothness of its liquid notes.

Except during the breeding season the thrush is abundant, but as that period approaches the greater number disappear, though a few pair remain in our treeless islands and make the best of any stunted bush that may serve the purpose of building in, so that the mavis' melodious pipe is by no means wanting on these rocky shores. I have often heard him making St Columba's hoar old shrine ring with his sweet notes, and be answered by a feathered comrade from the inland rocks and knolls.

The Blackbird.

Gaelic, Lon, or Lon dubh.

This favourite is also a winter bird, though a few pair breed wherever they can find a suitable spot; but the greater number come to us only to pick up a winter subsistence, and then not only collect about the gardens, stackyards, and abodes of man, but single individuals start up from behind the grey-lichened rocks on the moors, or dart with wild screams down the little gullies, where they are screening themselves from the gale and mist sweeping along the hillside. These seem much wilder and shyer than those which hop so familiarly about our gardens.[1]

enthusiasm" spoken of in the text is apt sometimes to lead to quite unintentional exaggerations; or it may be a spirit of fun or mischief may intrude. This form of pleasantry even crops up at times amongst educated persons, who have lived long enough amidst the isles, to participate in the Celtic sense of humour, which we need hardly demonstrate is not *always* understood by the Sassenach.—Ed.

[1] It may be remarked that the word *lon*, according to Armstrong, means both blackbird and elk, and in Campbell's *Tales and Legends* he tells us that the old blind giant of the Fingalian times was always lamenting over the good old times of his youth, when the thigh-bone of the blackbird (*lon*) was bigger than that of the red deer of these degenerate days (*fiadh*).

The great Irish elk is supposed to have been still extant when the aboriginal Briton hunted the wild bull, the bear, wolf, and beaver, so that the venerable giant had good cause to regret the decline in size of his venison, if by *lon* he

The Ring Ousel.

Though I never procured a specimen, "the *lon dubh*, with a white ring round his neck," was recognised by the description as common in Mull.

The Wheatear.

This welcome pretty harbinger of spring and fine weather penetrates to all the islands that I have visited. I have found its nest in the vestibule of a stormy petrel's habitation, being within the enlarged mouth of its burrow, on the little spray-swept islet of Soay, near Iona. On the larger islands it is seen flitting about the sheep pastures from one stone dyke to another, often making its nest in the interstices of the rough stone *fank*, or enclosure into which the wild hill sheep are driven at shearing time. In my boyish days the wheatear was in great demand in Sussex for the table, where it was served up on fried vine leaves, under the name of the English ortalan. It was captured by the Southdown shepherds in traps, formed by very neatly cutting out an oblong wedge of turf, leaving a deep trench about twelve inches by six, across which is stuck a bit of stick, like a butcher's skewer, supporting two horse-hair nooses. The turf is then laid with its grassy side downwards across the trench, leaving an aperture at each end uncovered, into which the confiding wheatear is expected to hop while searching for a nesting place, or seeking shelter from a passing shower, and so get entangled in the treacherous nooses. These traps were cut about ten yards from each other in continuous lines, stretching miles over the undulating Downs, so that the shepherd when taking his daily rounds had only to lift the turf slightly to discover whether there was any capture. At the end of the season the inverted turf was replaced, leaving scarcely a mark on the pasture. In this way great quantities were taken and brought to market at a shilling a dozen. This practice seems to be discontinued, as I now see no such traps where they used to be so common about Beachy Head.

meant the elk, the extinction of which must have been a severe loss to *fion* or "deer-eaters"—the name being derived from *fiadh dhuinne*, "wild man" or "wild deer men" (the *dh* is mute in both words), so descriptive of a savage man subsisting by the chase, such as were the original Fenians.

The Stone Chat.

Is a common bird in Mull and Iona. I have often been startled by his note in some wild solitary spot. It so exactly resembles the noise made by chipping a rock with a hammer, that I have hurriedly looked round expecting to see a stray geologist tapping a vein of gneiss, but of course only to see a quaint little bird with a black head sitting on a bunch of heather making this odd note of defiance at me.

The Redbreast.

Robin makes himself at home in any of the islands where man has his habitation, and meets with as much hospitality as in any other portion of the British Isles. The crevices in the old ruins give him an endless selection for nesting sites.

The White-throat.

Is occasionally met with in Iona among the shelter of the little glens.

The Gold-crested Wren and Blue Titmouse.

These pretty little birds do not visit the smaller islands, though they are plentiful enough on the mainland of Lorn and lower Argyllshire, where there are copses and hedges to shelter them.

The Hedge Sparrow.

Is abundant wherever man has made his abode, hopping about our little gardens and cultivated patches, contented to remain where he can find anything like a few bushes or shelter for himself and his little nest, and picking up his subsistence without wandering far from home.

The Grey Wagtail.

Is a not unfrequent summer visitor, but less abundant in the isles than on the mainland.

The Pied Wagtail.

This familiar little bird is met with on all the inhabited islands, flitting about the pastures in summer, and tripping about the poultry-yard and the precincts of the byres in winter. A hen will often make

a savage rush at the little intruder with the intention of pecking it, very like an irate dame running at a small boy "to lend him a box o' the ear." The wagtail, of course, easily evades the onslaught of the hen, and alights again within a yard of her tail with a flirt of his tail and a cheery *tee-wheet*, seeming to say, "All right, old lady! don't bother yourself on my account!" I suppose the more marked plumage of the wagtail attracts the attention of the poultry more than the equally pert but less motley clad sparrows; and a fact that favours this supposition is that of a tame canary escaping from its cage and eventually alighting in the hens' yard, where we expected easily to recapture it, but before any of us could interfere the hens flew at the interesting foreigner and demolished him.

The Meadow Pipit.

Is common enough all summer time, but whether they remain through winter or not I do not recollect observing.

The Rock Pipit.

I look on this little bird with peculiar interest and affection from the very unusual haunts and habits that he affects. Though his appearance is so like that of his congeners of the woods and meadows, yet you find him at home on the remotest and most desolate islets, round which the restless surges moan unintermittingly from year's end to year's end. When stalking sea-fowl among the huge sea-beaten rocks, there you are sure to meet the irrepressible rock pipit on the slippery rock within a few feet of the boiling surf, and the sight of the little, modest shore-going bird in such a scene of savage wildness and isolation is almost comforting and reassuring, as though there could not be danger where such a delicate, feeble creature finds himself comfortable and secure. On such occasions he shows no alarm at your appearance, as if knowing you had no designs against him, but only salutes you with a wild *tweet*, and does not suspend his busy inspection of the *dubs* of water left by the retiring waves. This quiet, confidential demeanour earns your gratitude; it is so unlike that of the fussy, red-shank "tatler," who would have alarmed and aroused the whole coast with all his call and clamour, his unnecessary tumult; and you leave the gentle bird behind, to find another one of the same species enjoying

himself in a still more horrible spot, and apparently ready to alight on your gun-barrel as you level it over a breastwork of wave-polished rock at (say) a party of golden eyes riding buoyant as corks just outside the broken water. I picked up one rock pipit, recently killed, that was cream-coloured, so much so that my boat-mates declared I had discovered a dead canary bird. Did his unusual colour attract the attention of some other bird and so lead to his death? The hoodie crows which flock in such numbers to feed at ebb must be most unamiable companions for these poor little pipits of the rock.[1]

The Raven.

Gaelic, Fitheach, which gives name to several places, probably from being the site of a raven's nest. *Craigan am fi' ich.* The raven's rock was the slogan or war-cry of the MacDonnels.

Though the ravens are not very numerous, yet a day can scarcely be spent upon the moors, or even sailing among the

> "Isles that gem
> Old Ocean's purple diadem,"

clustering round the west coast of Mull, without at least hearing the hoarse bark of a pair of ravens flying high up in the air. On a calm day you hear the whistle of their stiff quill feathers each time they strike the air, as they sail slowly along at a great height, and no doubt carefully observant of everything within ken of their bold cunning eyes, far below and extending far around. Gloak! gloak! the leader hoarsely cries from time to time; and gloak! gloak! his consort replies, in tones a little softened by greater distance, and so they glide away out of sight and hearing into mere black specks, bound on a predatory cruise to look after young lambs on the lower haunches of Ben Mòr. The old Vikings could not have adopted a more significant emblem than this bold ravener, not only on account of his instinctive love of blood and plunder, but also for his wonderful hardiness and contempt for the extremes of weather and climate. I have seen him buffeting against a Hebridean gale of wind in full swing, and braving the terrors of a Canadian winter snowstorm, when no other fowl showed a feather—acting up to the maxims of the Norsemen, "never to strike sail, blow high or blow low, and never to surrender till they had re-

[1] Albinos are constantly persecuted by members of their own species even unto death.—Ed.

ceived twelve bad wounds." A pair of ravens breed on Iona, and having one season harried their nest of five eggs, they at once commenced building another in a still more inaccessible spot on the other side of the island.

The Hooded Crow.

Gaelic, Fionnag, which is derived from skinning or flaying.

The black carrion crow is unknown in the western isles, as far as my experience goes, but to make up for it there is no end of hoodie crows. The hoodie has got a terribly bad name, and his best friend could not say much in his favour, supposing he ever had a friend, which I do not suppose is possible. A greedy, cowardly, destructive creature, with an ugly look and hateful voice. But though no doubt ready enough to commit any villany upon young game, eggs, chickens, and even young lambs, yet in these wild districts, where there is not much game to injure, he picks up his subsistence on the bountiful supply afforded by the receding tide, and upon this multiplies exceedingly; indeed, at feeding time, I might often string five or six at a shot, as they are too fat and impudent to get out of the way. Sometimes a grave synod of these sombre-hued creatures will be gathered round a stranded fish; another flies up in the air with a crab, which he lets fall to be broken on the rocks beneath. If he fails the first time, he flies a little higher, but he always descends himself so quickly as to alight almost at the same instant as the desired morsel, perhaps lest one of the brethren should put in a claim for it. On the grass above high-water mark are certain favourite rocks where the hoodies carry the molluscs they have picked up to be cracked at their leisure, and these favoured spots are marked by perfect mounds of *débris* of shells. While busy searching for food, little noise is heard among them, unless a heron or a hawk comes sailing by, and any large bird of this kind is instantly assailed by all the voices and the united strength of the company, which cordially join in frightening off the interloper. They roost at night among the rocks, and in summer their nests are very abundant there, though the birds are not so numerous then, as many of those who only sought winter quarters on the shore retire elsewhere to breed. The nests are generally easily accessible, and the birds are very persistent in replacing the eggs if taken, and rebuilding the nest if destroyed. I have tried the experiment of putting bantam's eggs,

daubed with indigo, in the place of the crow's eggs, and have removed the newly-hatched chickens before the foster-mother discovered her mistake. This implies, of course, a good deal of watching and intrusion, which the old birds did not mind in the least; indeed, though the hoodie has plenty of cunning, he has not a particle of shyness or modesty. On the first fine day in February the hoodie may be heard uttering his love note. He is not a bad-looking fellow then in his ash-coloured doublet, with glossy black sleeves, hood, and tail. He sits perched on some high rock basking in the sun, his stomach no doubt well filled, the picture of a sweet, unctious rogue, and emits a note like "corrack," with rather a metallic ring, and much more jubilant than his own usual dull caw. Indeed, this sound is so connected in my mind with a bright sun, a smiling blue sea, and the first burst of spring, that, were I a poet, I should feel inspired to address an ode to the hoodie as the herald of spring-time. When he utters this vernal note, he opens his wings and tail after the fashion of the cuckoo, and, in a word (as love is said to transform the savage), the hoodie looks almost handsome at such times. One of our most amusing pets was a hoodie crow, whose wing was amputated at the pinion after being shot, and lived a long time in the garden, where he laboured most assiduously in destroying every kind of vermin; and whenever any one opened the gate, he would come forward with a hop, skip, and a jump, and look up with one goblin eye, as much as to say, "What have you got for poor old hoodie?" I am obliged to conclude by bringing up a nearly obsolete saying, which would go to prove that this bird was considered a very serious scourge in bygone days, at least in one part of the kingdom—

> "The gule, the gordon, and the hoodie craw,
> Are the three worst things that Moray ever saw."

The gule is, I believe, the rag-weed. What the gordon was to the low country farmers of Moray needs no explanation.

The Jackdaw.

We have plenty of daws all the year round, plentifully diffused over the isles and the mainland. A colony of about thirty constantly inhabit the cathedral tower of Iona, roosting on its summit at night, and making their nests in it at the breeding season. Though only disturbed by the parties of summer visitors, which keep them wheeling

round and round the ruin during their short stay, and so permitted to breed in their inaccessible haunt unmolested by man or boy, they do not add to their numbers. At the end of the season the original thirty remain, neither more nor less; and I know of no other breeding place either in Iona or the opposite shores of Mull, though suitable caves and cliffs abound along the coast. The colony of jackdaws is a feature so connected with the tower that I have never seen a sketch of Iona Cathedral in which the artist has omitted to represent the flock issuing from its summit in a string.

Their common name with us is *Corrachan*, from *Corrach*—a cliff; though Armstrong only gives *Cottiag* (Ca' ag)—a name derived from its cry.

The Rook.

Is a winter visitant only to the islands, though it then comes in flocks, which remain for some time. Shepherds have assured me that though they would come day by day to feed in Iona, they never stopped the night, but recrossed the Sound to roost in Mull, though there are no trees even there within reach. Certainly I have continually met them at dusk flying low over the sea towards the precipitous shores which bound the southern shores of Mull. There are several rookeries on the mainland. One, for instance, at Achandorrach, Mr A. Campbell's residence, close to Lochgilphead; another on the opposite shores of Cowal. The inhabitants often cross over to feed in winter, but invariably return at night, and whenever I have been belated on the water shooting wild fowl, I have met them streaming home in small parties flying close above the boat, and have often nearly led me into firing into them by mistake.

The Magpie.

Is well known on the mainland, but a very unusual straggler on our islands.

The Chough or Red-legged Crow.

This is by far the most beautiful of all the tribe, as lively as the jackdaw, but far more elegantly shaped, and more graceful in his movements; his plumage, though as black as the blackest of the crows, shines as brilliant as burnished steel, with blue and purple reflections, and on the neck and body is of a soft silky texture; his legs and long

slender curved bill are of coral vermilion, contrasting with the jet black of his plumage. His sprightly manner, as he alights on the emerald green turf at a very short distance, and *chaw*, *chaws* at the intruder with half-extended wings and inclinations of the body, render him a charming fellow, once seen never to be forgotten. Three pair at least annually breed at Iona. Two nests are placed in a sea cave very difficult of access; the third is on the tower of the cathedral among the jackdaws, with whom they seem on the best of terms, often feeding with them abroad, and accompanying them home to this roosting place even when not nesting, and is the only bird admitted to this privilege, all others, especially crows and hawks, instantly being ejected on venturing to rest upon this sacred altitude. This reminds me of my old letters to you contributed to *The Naturalist*, where, at p. 217, E. K. B. supports my opinion against that of Mr Knox by his own observations on the "friendly relations subsisting between the two birds in question." Indeed, having referred to those letters, I do not think I need dwell further on the subject of this interesting bird, as I think I there mentioned all I can say on the subject. I can only add that I have subsequently seen them in Wales, and also in Cornwall, where a pair played around me on the green heights of the fearfully wild coast between Tintagel and Bude. Their voice and gesticulations seemed so familiar to me that they seemed to speak a language that I understood, and I found it hard not to recognise in them my own old favourites, who were expressing their surprise and congratulations at meeting an old friend in the solitary pedestrian so far from home. The red-leg, though not gregarious, does not avoid society, but they mostly lead a solitary life, that is, in single pairs, as if quite content with one another's society all the year round, apparently very much attached to each other, and always full of cheerful gaiety.[1] It is probable that in Wales and Cornwall the increase of population and of cultivation is gradually reducing their numbers, but I cannot see that such should be the case in our wildernesses, where the population is rather decreasing, where a pair are hardly shot in the same number of years, and where the cliffs, and caves, and hillsides, though a good deal the worse for wear and tear, are otherwise in the same condition as when first fixed up prior to Adam's time.

[1] In the west of Ireland, however, they are often seen in flocks feeding together, and also in Cornwall.—Ed.

The Starling.

Gaelic, Druid (pronounced trootch). The word *druid* also means to close, to shut up.

In summer many starlings nestle and rear their young among the crevices of the ruins of Iona, where their chatterings and queer noises are heard incessantly from dawn to dusk. Through the winter they also assemble here to roost, and entertain themselves preparatory to retiring for the night by a display of mimicry, and rival one another in producing queer noises. The imitation of the curlew's quavering whistle is perhaps the happiest execution. In the winter, too, they assemble in very considerable flocks while feeding in the fields, and are so noisy that they may be heard a long way off, and be easily stalked and watched from behind a stone dyke. They present at such a time a general scene of clamour and confusion, half-a-dozen pitched battles are going on at the same time in the midst of a universal Irish row, and more fun than fighting. A great many may be shot at such a time, and they are eatable in a pie. (I make it a rule in general to eat what I shoot, unless killing for the paramount duty of obtaining a skin or a specimen.) When not feeding, starlings often amuse themselves by flying about with great velocity, the whole flock formed into a solid mass, which darts about in the air, changing its formation like military evolutions. They do this when threatened by a hawk, which seems a mistaken instinct, for though they dodge about with great celerity and swiftness, the hawk charges through the whole block, and emerges on the other side with a struggling victim in his claws. It is like a human panic, where terror-stricken people crowd together with a fancied idea of security.

The Green Grosbeak.

Is common all the year.

The Twite.

Flies in dense flocks during the winter months, frequenting the stubbles and stackyards for feeding in principally, but are often found on the low strips of land skirting the shore, and on wild parts of the hills where there is pasture. When the sun begins to get strength in the beginning of spring, a vast number will congregate on some sloping

bank which catches all its rays and is sheltered from the wind, and there practise their singing; and though it is not possible to make out any particular song, the united voices of so many little choristers is very sweet, and may be heard a long way off. If disturbed, they start off in a whirl, uttering their cry of *tweet, tweet.* They are very little birds, and the males among those that remain in summer have the red crown and pink breast. I suppose them to be the mountain linnet and the greater redpole.[1]

The Common Sparrow.

Breeds abundantly in the ruins of Iona and elsewhere, of course keeping close to the habitations of man, and is otherwise of the same habits as his city brethren.

The Common Bunting.

All the stackyards and stubble fields abound with the corn bunting in winter; and in summer his monotonous little song is heard from every stone dyke and thatch-roof shieling, and his nest is often found in the grass.

The Yellow Hammer.

Gaelic, Buidheag bhealaidh (bu'eak velai')—*i.e.*, the yellowling of the broom. The English is the same as the German *Gold-ammer;* and may not bunting be from *bunt*—gay, lively, brisk?

Is resident, but not very numerous.

The Snow Bunting.

This very interesting winter visitor does not remain with us long at a time, but is blown here by hard gales or driven by unusual frost, and at such times the little flocks or parties that arrive affect the seashore, where they trip about like dotterel on the sand. This is almost the only little land-bird known to be identical in both hemispheres. I have met it wheeling about the frozen surface of Lake Ontario more than a mile from shore, and have seen them (with the thermometer 20° below zero) driving about in large flocks, mingling with the snowflakes which darkened the air, as the bitter blast bellowed over the whitened plain. When man and beast are housed, and even the domestic fowls, with frost-bitten combs and toes, huddle in their roost; when all manner of beast and bird is either far away in the south, or else in

[1] We have seen both species in Iona in the month of June.—Ed.

byre or stall, or den or nest, the hardy little snowflake is whirling about at his ease in the terrible blast, which would be death to almost any other living creature. This and the little blue sparrow, called the snowbird or chipbird, are the only two birds which brave the whole Canadian winter; but the latter is domestic, and clings to man's abodes for shelter and sustenance.

The Skylark.

Gaelic, Uiseag (pronounced ooshak).

"Guth na fasin uiseag," the voice of the lonely lark.—Ossian's *Taura.*

There is a large stone in Ayrshire called *Carn na uiseag,* the lark's cairn, which the country people say marks the grave of Ossian. The legend probably originated from the resemblance in sound of the words Ossian and uiseag.

On the cultivated fields, the lower pastures, and all the coast lands of Mull and Iona, the lark is very abundant, and the more welcome as being almost the only songster we possess. The praises of the lark have been so much celebrated on shore by poets, that I will only add that the effect of its song is equally exhilarating when heard on the water. After knocking about all night in an open boat on the dark waters, amidst sharp squalls, and rapid tides, and the occasional looming of a phantom ship apparently bearing right down upon you, hearing only the sighing of the wind, the wash of the waves, and the distant angry moan of breakers chafing against a reef, as day breaks we make the entrance of the loch we are bound for, and instantly enter calm water; the light brightens every minute, the sail is becalmed, but the flowing tide swirls rapidly inwards, carrying the boat along without any exertion of our own: no more "Look out ahead!" "Tend the sheet!" "Mind your helm!" We have only to rest and watch the first rays of the morning sun gilding the steep shores of the narrow inlet, and as we enter we are received by a burst of choral music, thrushes and blackbirds responding to each other from the opposite banks, and above all, high up in the air, the larks singing their morning orisons. Or perhaps the song of the lark is still more remarkably exhilarating when starting off by boat on a fine clear morning bound for the distant purple islands which hang upon the dark-blue horizon. As the boat runs along the low coast, skimming over the crisp blue waves, the larks spring up one after the other, continuing a succession of merry carols; and when the last point is passed,

and the boat stands out into deep water, and the land begins to diminish astern, as long as we can distinguish the white sandy bays and the green turf beyond, we still hear the jubilant chorus of many larks filling the air above, though growing fainter and fainter as the sea breeze now fairly fills the sail and the boat settles down to her work. At such a time it is almost impossible to refrain from bursting out into song one's self, or shouting or doing something to demonstrate the exulting feeling of sympathy with the scene around, which thrills within one's breast and circulates in one's veins, and must find vent.

Though remaining through winter, the larks are more plentiful in summer.

The Common Wren.

Gaelic, Dreollan, which also signifies a silly person, or fool, which is not at all applicable to the little wren, though the word is singularly like the French *un drôle*, a funny, comical person—a rogue.

We have plenty of wrens frequenting the gardens and the neighbourhood of our houses and byres. They are commonly seen flitting about on the dry stone dykes, and when startled they frequently disappear into one of the interstices and emerge again some paces further on with a merry little chirp, most tantalising to any dog or cat which may have been pursuing.

The Bullfinch.

Is found on the mainland of Argyll.

The Chaffinch.

Is very common, yet I have never seen them on the smaller islands nor in Mull, though they may visit the more cultivated island of Islay.[1]

The Cuckoo.

Cuach, the Gaelic name of cuckoo, is derived from the bird's cry; but the same word also means *bowl*, whence the low country word *quaich*.

At the usual time of year the welcome sound of the cuckoo's cry is heard in all the moorlands, peat mosses, and broken land, half scrub

[1] Saw large flocks of males in the stubble fields on the east of Mull in the autumn of 1886.—C. W. G.

and half rock, the birds usually selecting some slight eminence or knoll, whence they keep calling and re-echoing each other's cry, so that such favourite spots often get named after them, as *Mona' chuich*, the cuckoo's moor; *Dun chuich* at Inveraray, Penicuik, &c.

The Goatsucker.

Is not common, though I have heard them buzzing in the stunted underwood which grows in patches among the rocks of West Mull, and have taken its solitary egg lying on the bare ground.

Swallows.

The martin is far more abundant than the chimney swallow, being our common swallow, known as the *Gobhlan gaoithe* (go'lan gu'ie), the little forked thing of the wind. The martin or martlet is a heraldic figure represented without legs, and from the bird's supposed habit of living in the air without ever touching the earth, is emblematic of the Holy Spirit, and is the arms of the ancient abbey town of Arundel. It is also the distinction given in heraldry to the fourth son of a house, and is intended to intimate that he must depend on himself to rise in the world. The Glasgow city arms contain both the martlet and the fish holding a ring, the emblem of Christian baptism, or of the second Person in the Holy Trinity.

The Swift.

Is not a common bird, though one pair have a nest in the tower of Iona Cathedral.

I extract the following from a little book on ornithology, published in 1807, as illustrating the idea people had of birds migrating sixty years ago:—

"They (the swallows) are very strong of wing, and will remain a great while untired in the air. This makes their migration probable. They pass, as is believed by some, to France, and thence they can by easy journeys reach Gibraltar, whence their passage to Africa is very short. Others, however, have collected facts, or made observations which they believe establish their opinion that swallows do not migrate, but remain torpid either under water, or in the hollows of

cliffs or rocky caverns between the months of September and April." Of the sand-martins, "these, it is highly probable, pass the winter among dead reeds at the bottoms of lakes, pools, and slow rivers." Again, of the wheatear, "From Hastings, a little to the east of Beachy Head, the coast of France is visible on a clear day, and opposite Dover is the narrowest part of the channel. A strong and steady west wind would blow these voyagers so short a distance in a very little time. But if so, when and how do they return? Mr White calls them the *Sussex bird;* but the wheatear is certainly not peculiar to that county."

The Rock Dove.

On looking over my old letters to you, published in *The Naturalist*, I come to the conclusion that I can add nothing to the remarks that I sent you concerning the rock dove, except that in my long residence subsequently on the shores of Loch Fyne I never once saw it, though the wood pigeon (unknown in Iona) was abundant. I need only repeat that the rock dove abounds in Mull and Iona, breeding on all the rocky shores and remaining all the year.

Black Cock.

Gaelic, Coileach dubh—black cock. The female—Cearc fhraoich—hen of the heather.

On the wild tracts of land on the south-west of Mull the black game flourishes much more abundantly than the red grouse; you meet one brace of the latter to ten of the former in a day's walk over the moors and mosses.

Red Grouse.

Gaelic, Eoin rua'—red bird.

Is not so abundant as the last, perhaps for want of artificial encouragement and protection.

Ptarmigan.

Exists on Ben Mòr in Mull, whence I have seen specimens procured in their snow-white plumage.

The Heron.

Except during the breeding season this great bird is an accessory to our coast scenery, forming a conspicuous feature in every rocky bay and lonely sand flat, when the tide has begun to recede, standing immovable, watching for their prey. A slight motion of the head and neck, a levelling of the beak for aim, and a moment's suspense, usually precedes the lightning dart of head and bill under water, which emerges grasping some small writhing object which is quickly swallowed down, and followed by a shake of the head and bill, a comfortable shrug, and then a few steps deeper into the water, following the ebbing tide. When feeding in the pools among the rocks they are exceedingly wary against surprise, but on open sandy shores they are less shy, and will often allow a moderately near approach, and a party of seven or eight may be watched in such situations following their avocation of fishing. Though so numerous in winter, none remain to breed for want of trees. The nearest heronry I know is at Sir John Orde's seat at Lochgilphead, Kilmory Castle; but they build on the ivy-clad rocks at Ardnamurchan Point, and the gamekeeper at Inverlussa, Isle of Jura, assured me that they made their nests on the ground on the top of a steep high bank near the house, as St John mentions their also doing on an island of a loch in Sutherland. In both these places they no doubt feel themselves safe against human enemies; and as to rats and vermin, no doubt they know too much of the heron's sharp eye and sharper bill to venture near her nursery. Having no trees, when residing with us the herons roost on secluded, rocky islets, on certain of which, if visited by boat at high-water and approached noiselessly, a party of near a dozen or so may be surprised dozing together in the shelter of a high rock. Standing on one long stiff leg, their feathers all fluffed up in a great ball, with only the tip of the bill protruding, they look like a circle of great grey mops stuck in the ground. At the sight of a visitor among them, away they go, flapping and floundering, with every mark of consternation, but in perfect silence, till, having got some little distance and fairly on the wing, they come wheeling round to examine the cause of all their terror, and then scold him with braying screams for having given such a shock to their nerves. When winged, a heron will walk away among the rocks, cowering down and trying to conceal his tall

form as much as possible, his bright yellow eye vigilantly watching his adversary. When brought to bay, he defends himself valiantly, lunging out wickedly with his long rapier-like bill, quickly recovering himself in guard like a master of fence, and uttering such a dreadful discordant outcry, that on one such occasion, when picking up a wounded heron near a small fishing village, I was quite expecting the women to come out, supposing a child was being killed. A heron roasted is eatable cold, and that is all that can be said, though happily the carcase is surprisingly small for such a large conspicuous bird as a heron is in life. It is from being observable so far off and his known wariness that often makes it irresistible to try and stalk the heron. They are more easily approachable by boat, and at Lochgilphead, where they are unmolested out of respect to the owner of the neighbouring heronry, they allow the fishing boats to pass and repass them when they are wading in the shallows of the loch without any concern.

We always knew it as the *corra-ghribheag* (corra-kree-ack), the timid or flurried crane. It is also called the *corra-ghlas*, the grey crane; and in the Gaelic Bible the *corra-mhonaidh*, the crane of the moors.

A rocky peninsula in Iona is named *corr-eilean*, the crane's isle.

The Woodcock.

Gaelic, Coileach coille—cock of the wood; and Crom nar auileag, or Croman coillteach—the crooked thing of the leaves, or crookbill of the woods.[1]

Arrives in flights at the season of migration, but for want of sufficient cover does not remain in any sufficient numbers to yield good cock-shooting; but the island of Jura is famed for this sport. A party of peat-cutters came upon a young brood of woodcocks on the mosses opposite the island of Iona, and brought me one of the young downy chicks they succeeded in capturing.

[1] *Coillteach*, of the woods, sylvan, is the original of the word *kelt*, "the men of the groves," the wild man of the woods, applicable to the Celtic races as worshippers in the groves of oaks or as foresters and hunters, and most especially to the inhabitants of the woody hills of Caledonia. *Coille-dun* or *dūnach*—hilly woods. *Croman* is properly the kite, a bird now unknown to us, but is the name commonly applied to all the larger hawks, as *speirag* is to all the smaller tribe. The word means *crooked*, and designates the form of the hawk's bill and talons. I may remark here that Highlanders apply different names to certain beasts and birds in different parts of their country. Thus, about Lochgilphead the fox is only known as the *sionnach*, "the old one" (from *seanach*), and the name *mada'*

The Snipe.[1]

Abounds in all the moors, where in spring-time the belated traveller is sure to hear their peculiar bleating noise of that season of the year in the air over his head, which cry, if it is a cry, gives it one of its local names of *gabhar-adheir* (go'ar a'eir), the aerial goat. To a stranger unacquainted with the origin of this strange noise its effect is rather weird-like and creepy in such wild, lonesome spots. In winter the snipe is much more abundant, as frost and snow drive them down to the low lands of the coasts, and in rather hard frosts they assemble in considerable wisps about any unfrozen spring, and at such times I have seen them even on the sea-sands, where they ran about like tringæ.[2]

The Jack Snipe is occasionally killed in the islands, and of the Solitary or Double Snipe I have only seen one specimen, killed near Lochgilphead, which was preserved.

The Godwit.

Is not by any means a common bird with us. I have occasionally killed one on the seashore while making up a string of little birds for the *pot*.

The Redshank.

Gaelic, Feadag—the little whistler, the diminutive of Feadan, a whistle, the chanter of the bagpipes.

This troublesome little bird abounds along the coast except during the very height of the breeding season, when he retires inland. They

ruadh, "red dog," commonly used in Mull and the islands, is ignored. In the islands *bun-bhuachaille* is the name for the great northern diver, "the herdsman of the bottom;" on the mainland it is *mur-bhuachaille*, 'the herdsman of the sea." In the former the solan goose is *asau*, in the latter *ausa*, though in St Kilda it is *suilear;* from *suil*, eye, and *gheur*, sharp, from which appropriate name I presume the scientific name of *sula* and the Scotch name *solan* are taken.

[1] With us the snipe is generally known as *budagochd* (bood-a-cock), which I fear is a corruption and misapplication of the English woodcock, though it is not a purely local name as it is given in Armstrong. It is also called *gabhar-adheir*, already mentioned, and *meannau-adheir*, which has the same meaning. It also has the names *cubhag* and *haosg*, which have apparently no signification, though the latter word is connected with fickleness or inconsistency.

[2] A habit also recognised in the Outer Hebrides.—Ed.

are usually solitary, though at times they go in small flocks, when half a dozen or more may be killed at a shot. When accidentally disturbed among the rocks the redshank flies off, uttering a loud, clear, and rather musical call, half-whistle, half-cry, which is sufficiently alarming to any other birds in the vicinity; but if you come upon him unexpectedly and suddenly while screwing yourself among the rocks with the object of stalking some other birds, it is ten to one that he will not only cry out but continue fluttering about overhead, making such shrill vociferations as not only to sound an alarm, but to inform all the birds along the whole shore of your whereabouts and of all your intentions, who so thoroughly understand their little monitor that they immediately take the hint and are off. In this manner the redshank is such a good friend and sentinel for all manner of shore birds, whether waders or swimmers, that before commencing to stalk, it is as well to scan the shore to see if there is a redshank on the line, and if there is, to give him as wide a berth as possible by making any amount of extra circuit.

The Greenshank.

Is an unusual bird, quite a rarity.

The Common Sandpiper.

Summer visitant, whose brisk little pipe is always associated with early summer, and is heard not only on the banks of our inland fresh-water lochs, but on those of the great salt-water inlets, and along the more sheltered and least rugged coasts of the seashore.

The Dunlin.

Is common both in summer and winter plumage. These little birds, I believe, vary in size a good deal; at least I have often shot specimens so much smaller than the others around them as at first to lead me to suppose they were another variety.

The Curlew Sandpiper.

Is occasionally shot among other sandpipers and small frequenters of the ebb.

The Purple or Rock Sandpiper.

This is a much heavier looking bird than the other sandpipers, and is much more inert in his habits. They are always found creeping about on the rocks close to the wash of the surf, looking more like mice than birds, and when approached skulk or cower down upon the seaweed, where the colour is dark and something of the same shade as their own feathers, and they will allow themselves to be pelted with stones before they will fly. Though usually going in small parties of half a dozen or so, they may occasionally be met with in large flocks, resting at high-water upon an isolated rock with the sea breaking around it, and sometimes over them, and here they cluster together so thick as to cover the crest of the rock. When approached by boat they only huddle closer together, trying to creep out of sight and to hide themselves behind one another, and it is only at a very near approach that, with a feeble remonstrative pipe, they all take wing together, fly off in a compact mass, tack in again and alight on a similar rock at no great distance, tumbling and fluttering over each other as they alight in a dense body. If disturbed a second time they repeat the same manœuvre, often pitching again on the same rock they were first disturbed from. Of course a good many may be shot at such times, and then they all go into the omniverous *pot*, by which I mean served up roasted along with the rest of their tribe which have been bagged the same day, and very dainty morsels we thought them too. In summer they have nearly all disappeared, but some pairs seem to linger even then on some of the outlying islands, and in May and June, when visiting some of the more distant and lonely skerries in pursuit of gull's eggs, I have been received at the slippery and dangerous landing place by a couple of quiet little rock sandpipers, who then have bright orange yellow legs and bills—ochreous-yellow at the base—and altogether are more spruce looking than when last seen in winter.

The Turnstone.

Is like the last, abundant through the winter months, feeding busily among the pebbles and gravel on the seashore, though not quite so bustling and active as the tringæ. At high-water they repose in small flocks on the rocks above high-water mark, and I have seen

them in stormy weather occasionally feeding on the newly-ploughed fields. In summer they nearly all leave us, but some few linger till the end of May, when their plumage undergoes a great change, and I have even seen them in pairs in the end of June, when they had fully assumed their complete summer garb—a beautiful tortoise-shell, with very distinct and fantastic black markings on their otherwise dusky red and pure white plumage; and though I never discovered their nest, I should imagine these were breeding on the smaller islands, Staffa for one. All these interesting little birds are lumped under the general name of *triollachan tràigh*, the little quaverers of the shore, from *trioleau*, a quavering.

The Curlew.

Gaelic, Guilbinn (guley-pin), from *guil*, a weeping or wailing, and *binn*, music; also Crann-tach, one with a long bill, "coulter-neb," from *crann* (crown), a tree, beam, plough, &c. Its nocturnal, wild cries in moors and lonely places have connected it with evil company, and "ghaists and whaup-nebbed things" are associated in the superstitious rural mind as tending to make night hideous.

Is exceedingly abundant. Our deeply-indented coasts and many islands present such a disproportionate extent of shore as to offer an illimitable feeding ground for any amount of curlews at every ebbing tide, while the adjacent land is chiefly composed of moors and mosses, full of pools and lakes, and wild broken tracts made up of rock and heather, solitary and undisturbed, of a very nature to suit these birds when the flowing tide forces them to seek their food inland, or gives them an interval for rest and digestion. At these latter periods they gather into very large flocks, numbering hundreds, and are so shy and wary as to make them quite inaccessible to approach, unless by extreme caution, favoured by good luck. Not only is every individual bird vigilant to observe the remotest sign of danger, but there are certain ones specially told off to the duty of acting sentinel, and these are very conspicuous in rough ground, where rocks obstruct a clear view all round and favour the treacherous approach of a foe, as they post themselves on the summit of a rock or elevated mound, whence they can observe the most distant approach of danger, and at the least symptom of anything suspicious he gives a shrill warning whistle, which instantly puts his comrades on the alert, who, with heads erect, respond with

answering cries of attention, and at a second confirmatory louder warning, all take wing with tumultuous screams of alarm, and disappear over the crest of the hill.

When instinct tells them that the rocks and sands are beginning to be laid bare by the refluent tide, they rise in noisy chorus and pour down upon the seashore, where they spread themselves along the coast, to commence the important operation of feeding. At this time a few shots may be got by any one lying in ambush awaiting their arrival, though even then they are as wary as ever, and never begin to feed till they have scanned the horizon round to make sure that the coast is clear. The flocks then disperse and line the shore in ones and twos or little groups, keeping up a frequent interchange of intercommunicatory screams, some expressing that "All's well," others of content and satisfaction, varied with occasional cries of caution, starts of alarm, or the sudden rending screams of undoubtful imminent danger. At this time they may be successfully stalked, as they are occupied, have no look-outs, and may be come upon in situations favouring a stealthy approach; but a small boat is generally the most successful, and certainly the least laborious means of getting shots, either by sailing in upon them, or paddling along the rugged, broken shore. Like other shore birds which feed by feel and not by sight, the curlews are as active by night as they are by day whenever the tide serves, and their wild cries are borne in upon the breeze, accompanied by the hoarse murmur of the distant waves, when the window is opened during a dark, quiet night at such a time. Various cries and whistles are continually being interchanged amongst them as they keep calling to each other through the darkness; then comes a sudden, shrill, querulous note of alarm, followed by an outbreak of shrieks and screams, which ring all over the distant scaup banks and sand-flats, and gradually subside again into quiet, only broken by an occasional musical ringing cry, expressive of satisfaction, a long, quavering, gurgling, exceedingly wild note, which has given it its Gaelic name of *Guilbinn*, the musical wailer or lamenter. From their great abundance, the curlew forms the staple of our wild-fowl shooting, and from the difficulty of getting within shot, there is a keen feeling of exultation in outwitting such an excessively wary creature by superior strategy. A Gaelic saying runs to the effect, "When a man has shot six herons, six wild geese, and six curlews, he may call him-

self a sportsman." I may lay claim to the title of having shot a good many more than the requisite half-dozen of each kind, but most especially in the article of curlew, as I seldom returned home in the evening without a pair. Whether from the difficulty of procuring them, or the excellent appetite acquired in the pursuit, we thought them very good eating, which reminds me of an old English rhyme—

> "A curlew, be she white, be she black,
> She carries twelve pence on her back,"

which I suppose was the market price of the bird in old days. The difference of colour, I suppose, is only the darker hue of the old, longer-billed birds to that of the younger and lighter-coloured individuals.

The Whimbrel.

Gaelic, Guilbinnach.

This bird, though so similar to the last in appearance, is totally different in habits. It is a migratory bird, and only visiting us during the month of May, arriving very early, generally the 1st, and remaining till the very last, during which time they are abundant, and may be killed without difficulty, as they are tame and unsuspicious.

When the wintry storms have at last done roaring, and the sea is still and peaceful, and the air genial, then the peculiar and unusual call of the whimbrel announces the fact that summer is nigh. Its call consists of several rapidly-repeated, clear, short whistles, about seven times uttered in rapid succession, which has given it the English local name of the "seven whistler." This cry is uttered as the flocks are flying to and fro, high in the air, before alighting on the grass-covered sandy levels, enamelled at this time of year with wild hyacinths and blue-bells, which skirt a considerable portion of the shores of Iona, the undulations of which afford shelter enough for approaching them. A flock of some thirty or forty birds scattered over the green turf form a very alluring sight, and their comparative heedlessness makes them an easy prey to one accustomed to circumvent the jealous curlew. They are good eating, and in very good condition, as if their migratory journey had not been at all a harassing one. This is only a temporary halt on their journey further north, and they gradually disappear, till, after the end of May, they are all gone, and only an occasional whistle is heard of a single straggler afterwards. This is not a place of call on the southerly

migration, at least not in large flocks, for only a few single individuals may sometimes be met with in autumn. I am not aware of any breeding place near.

The Lapwing.

Gaelic, Adharcan luachrach, the horned creature of the rushes; Curacag, hooded; and Pibhinn (pee veen), from its cry; and *binn*, musical, shrill.

This well-known bird is common enough at all times of the year, though not in anything like the abundance it is found in on estuaries of rivers and fen lands. In winter small flocks may be met with on the moors or on the seashore, and in the breeding season pairs are found scattered over all the moors and on almost every island, even the very smallest, if, as is usually the case, a spot of boggy, wet ground exists somewhere on its rocky surface.

The Golden Plover.

Gaelic, Feadag and Triollachan, the little whistler or *triller*.

Remains with us all the year round, but in winter alone is ordinarily met with in small parties on the seashore. In more than ordinary hard frosts they assemble in very large flocks, and at such times are not only void of their usual shyness, but seem absolutely without consciousness of danger, and I have lain down close to a flock, waiting an opportunity of stringing as many as possible at a shot, when they would run close past the muzzle of the gun. At other times, when only a little uneasy at being approached, I have remarked their instinct of rendering themselves inconspicuous. When first seen running on the white sand, or with the sea for a background, they look quite large birds, but in a moment they get on to broken ground among rock and stones, where they squat and compress themselves in such a manner as to become nearly invisible, avoiding clustering together or getting in a line, and so presenting as small a mark as possible for firing at.

The sandy, grass-grown levels of the island of Tiree abound with golden plover in autumn and winter.

The Dotterel.

I never met with, though it is known by name as the *Amadan mòintich*, the fool of the moor.

The Ring Dotterel.

Is a very common species on the gravelly seashores in winter, resting at high-water on the sandy banks among the bent which grows upon them; and in summer a few breed here, though I only once found a nest, or rather the eggs. They seem to be a good deal persecuted by the stoat, whose tiny footmarks I have often observed imprinted on the wet sands which these birds frequent, both by day and night, when the tide is out; and when rummaging out a stoat's nest, a number of ring dotterels' wings are invariably found among the bones, feathers, and other refuse forming the little hunter's spoils of the chase. I have seen the stoat hunting in such localities, and if he happens to be in his ermine dress, he forms a very interesting object, running backwards and forwards, stealthily but swiftly, beating carefully over every inch of ground, winding in and out of the rocks, turning the sharp corners with almost a snake-like action, and so intently occupied as to allow you to approach near enough to stop his career for ever.

The Sanderling.

Is rather an unusual straggler, though I may have often overlooked him among the tribes of little shore-birds which swarm along our coasts, and are known under the general title of *Triollachan tràigh*.

The Oyster-catcher.

The *Gaelic* name on the western coast is Gillebride (gilly-breech), the servant of St Bride, though I never heard the reason of this bird being peculiarly dedicated to that saint.

Is extremely abundant, and a decided feature in our maritime scenery, his pied plumage and shrill clamour making him very conspicuous among the dark, fierce skerries of the "hoarse Hebrides," cresting the reefs in great flocks, whence their merry, varied screams ring above the deep murmur of the surf, full of merriment and glee, for they are very lively birds, gregarious, fond of society, and apparently much attached to each other, for, should one of their number fall wounded, the rest of the flock circle over their fallen comrade with loud cries, expressive of sympathy, surprise, and anger, unmindful of the approach of danger threatening them with the same fate. Though

not fitted by nature for a swimming bird, the sea pyet is well able to swim in any emergency, and, when wounded, will endeavour to escape capture both by swimming and diving. But though able to remain a considerable time under water and dive to some depth, he is unable to *swim* beneath the surface, which makes a wounded duck or diver so difficult of capture. More than once I have seen a whole flock alight upon the water a long way from the land; it was when the sea was perfectly calm, and I supposed them to be attracted by the large shoals of young herring fry which were swimming near the surface. Fish, as well as molluscs, form part of their diet, and the birds that we have occasionally kept in confinement would eat it greedily.

The oyster-catcher breeds upon many of the isolated rocky islands and stacks of rock, making a slight nest of sea-pink, like the gulls; its eggs, also, so resemble those of the gulls that it is difficult to distinguish them from kittywakes. We always eat the oyster-catchers, and used to shoot them for that purpose, though, like most of such birds, their flesh is more palatable cold than hot.

The Water Rail.

I have only met with from time to time in severe weather, when frozen out of his places of concealment; at such times it is easily captured alive, and becomes quickly reconciled to captivity, feeding on raw meat finely cut up, and taking it freely from hand quite familiarly.

The Corncrake.

Gaelic, Treun ri treun.

Loudly announces his arrival in May, on or about the 12th, when all the meadows, fields of growing corn, and especially the rank weeds and vegetation about the Iona ruins ring with his unintermitting and monotonous cry. At first it is rather pleasing, as being associated with summer and fine weather, but it soon becomes wearisome, especially when it is continued all through the night, which in these northern latitudes is scarcely dark even at midnight. I have sometimes been urged to turn out at that unusual hour with my gun and favourite dog, both of which shared my bed-room, and by the ruddy light from the northern sky, where the sun seemed to be rolling along only just beneath the horizon, have beat up the long grass in front of

the house to dislodge this murderer of my sleep. A good many may be shot on their first arrival, when the grass is not so very long. They are very good eating; indeed, the game-laws include them under the head of game. Perhaps they once were more numerous in England. Here, in Sussex, I never hear their *crake*, and they seem only to be known as a bird of passage, making a temporary stay on their way to and from their breeding places. In Iona many nests are discovered when the grass is cut for hay, containing from twelve to fifteen eggs, and I have often wondered how so small a bird can cover so many, especially as they are large in proportion to the size of the bird. The water rail swims well, but I have also seen the corncrake or land rail take the water and swim when forced to do so.

I must give you a morsel from my favourite author, of date 1807. "By Dr Darwin we are told that all the water-fowl of Liberia begin their journey to the south as soon as the first frost sets in, the rail alone remaining, which becomes torpid, and sleeps under the snow.

> 'His torpid wing the rail, exulting, tries,
> Mounts the soft gale, and wantons in the skies.'

The people of the north being asked how rails migrate, because they seem to have no power to take long flights, have replied that, when the cranes go away, they each take a rail upon his back."

It is remarkable that the water rail, who suffers so much by being frozen out of his haunts, should not follow the example of his cousin, the land rail, and remove to warmer climes for the winter.

The Water Hen.

Is not very abundant, but two pair come regularly to breed upon a little marshy pond among the hills of Iona. I suppose the natives are not very familiar with it, for on showing a specimen I had captured to a party of Ionians, they could not think what it was, till an old man very seriously observed that it must be a devil in feathers, because, having the legs and feet of a common hen, it swam and dived, and so presumed to run in the face of nature.

I had great difficulty in getting this first specimen, as the birds invariably disappeared under the water the moment anybody came near, and they remained submerged and invisible as long as you stayed in sight. Their habit is to sink under water all but the end of their

bill, through which they breathe, and which is, of course, impossible to detect in a pond whose surface is broken by reeds and weeds. The grebes do the same, and I have seen one performing the trick in clear, open water, where I could see him distinctly submerged all but the bill.

NATATORES.

The Wild Swan.

Gaelic, Eala, whence the name of Lochnell—*Loch nan eala.*

Like most of our larger and nobler birds, the swan is becoming scarce where living men remember them to have been most abundant, and I was continually tantalised by hearing tales of the large flocks of swans which used to frequent Iona and the adjoining parts of Mull, and the frequency of their being shot by the few who in those days possessed guns. Still a winter scarcely fails to bring one or two flights of these splendid birds, either flying through the Sound or sometimes alighting on some piece of water either in Iona or on the opposite shore of Mull, the news of which was usually not long in reaching me. One morning our shepherd announced the arrival of a small flock upon Loch Staonig, the pool where the water hens breed. Guided by him, we reached a rock which commanded it, and on raising my head, seven swans rose on clanging wing. I fired at the nearest, apparently without effect, as they held away towards the Mull coast. However, in the evening my swan was brought to me by a man who saw it drop behind his comrades and sink to the earth, where he picked him up quite dead. I heard while at Lochgilphead of a black swan having been seen about, and one day in my punt I came up with him on Loch Fyne. I supposed it to have escaped from some neighbouring gentleman's grounds, perhaps from the Duke of Argyll's castle at Inveraray, but on inquiring afterwards I could not find any one in our part of the country having lost such a bird, and I rather regretted not having culminated in such a noble specimen of a *rara avis*, after which I might have gracefully retired from the pursuit of wild-fowl shooting, as nothing more would then have been left me to desire, unless it were an unusually fine specimen of a phœnix.

Geese.

All the small isles which "guard famed Staffa round," inclusive of itself, are the resort of innumerable wild geese, who select these unfrequented localities for their winter quarters, for there they find abundance of grass, and almost perfect immunity from the visits of man. Even the very smallest of these islets support so many head of cattle, according to their size. Staffa's regulation number is fourteen or fifteen. These beasts are deposited in autumn and left to themselves all winter, and when revisited in spring are "wild as the wild deer," and both startle and are startled by the arrival of some hundred tourists by the first Staffa and Iona steamboat. All through the winter these islands are almost entirely inaccessible, landing seldom being possible upon their sorely-vexed shores. Should a few days' break occur in the ever-successive tempests which roar over the Hebrides all winter, such a short interval is not sufficient to let the scourged ocean quiet down enough to permit a boat alongside their rocks. So it is very rarely possible to disturb the geese in these their well-chosen places of resort, and they must be watched and waited for when they sally forth to make descents upon the larger islands, and what we call *mainland*. I have, however, occasionally succeeded in effecting a landing and surprising them on their own ground, at least *some* of them, for a boat approaching an island is a very marked object, and the geese keep streaming away in long strings all the time she keeps nearing it, and those only remain which are on the other side of the island or lying in a hollow, and these are what the landing party must hope to come upon, as on them all their hopes depend; for after the first shots have been fired, all is over for that time, as it is impossible to linger on an island where a swift-rising tempest may catch you and storm-stay you beyond all hope of recovery for a week or a month. Judging from the traces they leave behind them, the number of geese frequenting these islands must be vastly great, and it is almost a wonder any grass is left at all for the legitimate grazers. I have seen a futile attempt at putting up a *bodach*, or scarecrow, which never deceives such a sagacious bird as the goose, nor does the man of straw long survive the elementary wrath which is poured upon his battered crown. In this part of the country geese are winter visitants only, and I have not heard of their breeding or being seen in summer. Though there cannot

be, therefore, any chance of a dash of wild blood being infused into the barnyard stock of geese (as there is in our ducks), yet it is remarkable that our domestic geese are more than usually volatile in all our islands, and it is not an uncommon thing for a gudewife to lose her whole stock in one night through neglecting to cut their wings in time. They usually give warning, as the critical time of migration approaches, by taking wing for short distances and general flighty behaviour. They have been known to leave Iona and cross the Sound, not returning for a day or two. So they extend their flights until they fly away for good. Sometimes a flock has come in from Tiree, twenty miles and more due west of us, and their owners have come by boat after them to recover them. My friend Mr M'Vean lost a fine flock one winter. There was one solitary duck living with them, and she, determining not to be left behind, started in company with her bigger associates. They were observed at several points in their flight across Mull, and attracted special attention from the remarkable appearance presented by the party—the geese, after the fashion of their kind, flying in a long string, and the odd duck gallantly keeping her position underneath the line. They were last seen steering south. These lost birds never return; probably they are captured or killed wherever they alight.

The Bean Goose.

Is one of the winter frequenters of the islands, visiting the larger ones to feed at night.

The Pink-footed Goose.

Is another of the winter geese, and by no means a rare one, but the general colour of the grey geese is so similar that you cannot tell one kind from another at a distance. A large flock always breaks up into battalions when put to flight, which I suppose to be the different species keeping together, though the barnicles are the only ones whose species you could be certain about. The first pink-footed I got was early on a stormy morning. He astonished our tame geese by alighting among them, which they clamorously protested against. The uproar attracted the attention of the herd, who easily detected the stranger by his graceful form and elegant action, much more conspicuous than any difference of colour in the grey morning's sullen light. Being notified, I ran out and shot it in the light and airy drapery of the bed-chamber.

The White-fronted Goose.

My friend C. M'Vean got one specimen last winter (?) at Iona, which he had stuffed in Edinburgh.

The Barnicle Goose.

Gaelic, Geadh blàr—white-faced goose.

This is by far the most plentiful of our geese, and the kind we most frequently shoot. It winters on the small islets in company with the grey geese, and continually visits the larger islands to graze on certain favourite spots, where they may be either stalked or waited for. The afternoon and evening is the usual time for looking for them, though they may be there at any hour of the day. The great care of the stalker is to keep out of sight of the sentinel, who is easily known by his erect neck, which never moves, not even to pluck one beakful of grass. I would rather expose myself in full view of the entire flock feeding, if obliged to cross a bad bit in the line of stalk, for the sentry's whole senses are concentrated in his duty, while the others are only bent on their food, and will allow a slight suspicion of danger to pass. For a moment they may cease feeding and then go on again, as if they thought it was not their business to give the alarm. It is like the story of the naval officer, who, being aroused in his hammock with the announcement that the ship was sinking, replied, "Well, what's the use of disturbing *me?* It's not *my* watch." The barnicle are plump little geese, and most excellent eating.

The Brent Goose.

Is but a straggler among our islands, and is easily shot, as such birds usually are, seeming dazed and out of their reckoning, and are commonly in bad condition. At Lochgilphead a party of half-a-dozen would stay a day or two in early spring in the loch; they were easily approached, but the birds were in good condition. The brent is as rare on the shores of Argyll as the barnicle is abundant.

The Sheildrake.

Gaelic, Craigag, from craig and geadh—rock goose. *Norse*, Graf-and—burrowing duck.

This handsome, showy bird is common at all times. Its nest is frequently found on the smaller islets, in rocky holes, or holes scooped

in the sand, and the young broods are often met swimming a little way from the land, convoyed by one or two of the old birds, who show their uneasiness by flying about, rising and alighting just out of shot of the approaching boat. But their anxiety for their little ones is groundless, as the little downy creatures are quite able to take care of themselves. They disperse in all directions, and dive and double under water with surprising agility and cunning, so as to make catching them impossible. Being mud-feeders, we never cared to shoot the sheildrakes for the pot, for, in spite of their fine feathers, they are but foul feeding. Neither feeding on land like geese, nor on fish and seaweed like the true maritime tribes, they are "neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring."

The Mallard.

Gaelic, Lach and Tonnag—the latter from tonn, a wave. "Lorg na lacha," the track of the duck—*i.e.*, to go by water. *Norse*, Gräs-and—grass duck.

Wild-fowl shooting has been so well described by Colonel Hawker, St John, and other giants of sporting literature as to render my attempts at making any original remarks on the subject very liliputian. I can only state that the wild duck is still plentiful among the islands, where it is known as the "big Scotch duck," in distinction to the widgeon, which is the "Norwegian duck." Nests are found on nearly all the fresh-water lakes, large and small. We have often put their eggs under a common hen, the result being a brood of very wild little ducklings, which require having their wings cut early, and constant watching to prevent them running away; and it takes three or four generations before they become quite domestic, and in proportion as they become so, their plumage begins to vary from the uniform colour of the original wild stock, and their forms lose the elegant grace and lightness of their ancestry. These reclaimed birds keep aloof from the dull denizens of the duck-pond; they often take long flights, and will make their nest in strange out-of-the-way places, such as the roof of a cow-shed ten feet above the ground.

The Widgeon.

Is more numerous than the last in winter, but more local, congregating in large flocks in every suitable bay. Loch Gilp and other inlets of Loch Fyne, Loch Tarbert, Jura, Loch Swein, Feochain, Caolisport, &c., and many other lochs on the mainland and islands of Argyll, are

famed for the quantities of widgeon frequenting them, in spite of the constantly increasing number of guns which are brought to bear upon them. The birds are shy where they expect to be molested, but the same birds in another place, where they consider themselves safe from molestation, are quite free of shyness. I have often proved this by putting up a flock in Loch Gilp, which would rise wildly at the punt's approach 200 yards off, then following them to the retired inlets at the junction of Lochs Fyne and Gilp, would find them sitting till within forty or fifty yards of them. In certain bays they cannot be approached, while in others they let themselves be easily stalked. The wounded birds are troublesome to capture. I have seen them holding on to the weed at the bottom in shallow water, and have had to dislodge them with the boat-hook, or reach them with my arm if not too deep. In March, when they break up into pairs, but have not yet finally quitted our shores, I have sometimes, while coasting, come upon a pair in full breeding plumage—enjoying their honeymoon in fact—in some out-of-the-way little creek. The duck, trusting to the unobtrusive nature of her plumage, will remain floating among the long fronds of brown seaweed; but the drake, who shines like a bright star, gets fidgety, and flies about, calling in vain to his capricious mate, who will not take the hint to follow, and at last forces him to pitch on the water a little way off. The duck at last rises when the boat is within thirty yards, flies a short distance and alights again, where she is immediately joined by her faithful spouse. The same performance may be gone through again and again, till very often, if you are in want of a full-plumaged male, he falls a victim to the caprice of his partner and his own gallantry.

The Teal.

Gaelic, Crann lach—tree duck.

Is commonly distributed, though not very abundant, through the isles. One or two pairs may often be found breeding in the neighbourhood of the moorland lochans, and in winter they are found there in small flights, or driven down to the seashore in hard weather among the mallards and widgeon, where it is usually very tame and easy of approach, rather skulking, and trusting to its diminutive size to escape observation; but if it does rise, it does so so noiselessly, so suddenly, and clips away so sharply, that it is difficult to suppose it to be a duck at all.

The Gadwall.

The only specimen I ever met with was sent me by C. M'Vean from Barra island in the autumn of 1863. It is now in the collection of Captain Orde of Kilmory, who exhibited it at a meeting of the British Ornithologists' Union in London the same year.

The Red-headed Pochard.

Though well known to us, is not a very frequent or abundant species. It appears from time to time in the depth of winter upon some of the fresh-water lochs, where it is very confiding and easily shot for a few days, but quickly grows shy, and, if much disturbed, leaves altogether. I don't remember meeting with it on salt water.

The Scaup.

A much more maritime duck than the last, and a very regular winter resident, though not very abundant; is often killed on the coast or on fresh water.

The Red-crested Pochard.

Only one specimen, a beautiful male, ever came into my possession. It was sent by Captain M'Dougall of Lunig, and was shot on a fresh-water loch in Craignish, January 7, 1862, when in company with some golden eyes. Sir William Jardine, in *The Naturalists' Library*, can give no instance of its capture in Scotland, and describes the bird from Yarrel, who first noticed it in Britain. My brother-in-law, who was returned on leave from India, recognised it as one of the most abundant species which he was in the frequent habit of shooting, and is called the lal-seer, red-head. The common teal, widgeon, and gadwall were the only others of our ducks which he was acquainted with in the East.

The Golden Eye.

Norwegian, Knipa.

Is common, though not very abundant, both on the seashore and on fresh water. It is truly a sea duck in its disregard for breakers and horrible surf-beaten, iron-bound coasts, swimming securely on the bosom of monstrous waves, diving to avoid their curling crests. They are usually in little parties of about two or three males, with about double their number of females and immature birds in the *morillon* stage.

They are as quick divers as any bird. As the whole party dive simultaneously, and remain a long time down, it is not difficult to stalk them on a rocky shore. After taking the last run, I have reached a capital position behind a high rock commanding the spot where the party last dived, some thirty or forty yards off, and there wait in anxious expectation for their reappearance. In a moment up they all come; before they have time to "get the water out of their eyes" I have covered a male and a duck in the same line, and fire. The shot cuts a circular patch of white foam, the size of a tea-tray, on the spot where the birds were—*were*, but are not, for as the foam subsides and the smoke clears, they have all disappeared, and no corpse cumbers the fair surface of the water. A moment after, up they all rise, a good gunshot further off. Their escape seems miraculous, and can only be explained by supposing that the snap of the cap gives them time enough to dive, though it appears to us to be simultaneous with the discharge of the gun.[1]

The golden eye is abundant in Upper Canada, and I have shot a good many on the lakes after the breaking up of the ice; also, the beautiful little buffel-head, or *butter-boat*, as they call it, which is very like the golden eye, and seeing the two together always gave me the impression that the golden eye of America was a bigger bird than that of the Old World.

The Long-tailed Hareld or Ice Duck.

Norse, Al fogel.

I can add nothing further on the subject of this bird to the account I gave you by letter, which afterwards appeared in *The Naturalist*, p. 212. My friend Colin M'Vean says they have deserted the bay in Iona, which used to be so much frequented by them as to be named by us long-tailed duck bay. I should suppose these changes are attributable to some occult change in the growth of the submarine vegeta-

[1] Shooting guillemots, &c., out of a boat, very often seem to dive at the snap of the cap, but very often it is from seeing the gun brought up to the shoulder. When ranging up within reach of a scart or large diver, the bird is keenly on the alert, ready to dive at the least extra alarm. The best plan is to bring the gun up gently to the shoulder, and then keep the bird on for a few seconds; then, as he keeps looking first with the one eye and then the other, take him as his head is turned sideways, and fire. He will be arrested in the very act of plunging.

tion, which forms the pasturage of these creatures, for quantities of widgeon, which formerly were not wont to congregate there, have taken their place. Does old Neptune keep pace with the times and practise rotation of crops down below there at the bottom?

The native name for this duck is *lach bhinn*, the musical duck. It is very common on the Canadian lakes, under the name of the *cow-wee* duck (a word supposed to imitate part of its cry). At the mouth of the river Niagara (March 1855), when Lake Ontario was still choked up with ice, and the waves froze in icicles as they dashed on the rocks, I was walking on the shore in the evening and recognised the well-known voice of the long-tail, so familiar to me in Iona, as it was borne in on the blast from a large flock disporting themselves among the hummocks and floating masses of ice.

The Scoter.

Norse, Sjo-orre—sea blackcock.

I never saw any of the scoters out among the isles, and at Lochgilphead I only saw them on two occasions, though unfortunately I got no specimen on either occasion. The first time, as I was launching my punt, a friend came up and offered to shoot if I would put him within range. I did my part and he missed his, so I lost that chance. The second and last occasion was a splendid male velvet scoter, who paraded himself under my garden wall, his jetty plumage flashed in the sunshine, and his red bill was all aglow, like Bardolph's nose—but it was Sunday. I offered to use a loose leaf out of an old bible for wadding, but I could not get a dispensation from the authorities (Mrs G.) to shoot, though this would have been a new method of diffusing the Scriptures among the *blacks*, so I could do nothing but watch him sailing about within thirty yards. Virtue was not rewarded by his return on a week day, though anxiously looked for, not to say prayed for.

The Eider Duck.

Norwegian, Ejdar gäs—eider goose.

The eider is very numerous indeed in our seas, and may be met with at all times of the year along shore or half-way out to Tiree, ten or fifteen miles from land. The male birds shine like stars upon the deep purple, long-heaving swell which heaves in from the Atlantic Ocean. They are not very shy of being sailed down upon, and are less

suspicious of a large boat than of a smaller. We considered them better eating than most other maritime ducks; they seem to feed entirely on seaweed, browsing at the bottom in deep water. When startled, they take flight at once, without having recourse to diving as a means of escape. We sometimes find the nest upon the unfrequented islets, among the rocks a little above the sea-level. The eggs are large, of a greenish colour, and we once hatched a set under a common hen, but did not succeed in rearing the ducklings, probably from want of water, proper food, and liberty, as they survived only about a fortnight. They were black, and the size of goslings. Eiders abound on the isles of Colonsay and Oronsay, whose coasts are surrounded by them in spring and summer, and, in common with hordes of other wild fowl, they increase and multiply on the rocks of those islands under the protection of the proprietor, Lord Colonsay, who does not allow them to be molested, though on my visit to the island he most courteously gave me leave to help myself to as many specimens of any kind as I liked. The eider is commonly known in this part of the country by the name of *Lach Cholonsa*—the Colonsay duck.

The Goosander.

Norse, Stor-skraka or Kör-fögel—diving bird.

Is very plentiful along our shores, I may say all the year round, for though I have never found it actually breeding, it cannot be very far off, as the young broods make their appearance at a very early age, diving and fishing as actively as the old birds. The goosander is not difficult to shoot, as they can be stalked when diving near the land, where they come in very close sometimes to catch small flounders and other little fish. One I shot had just bolted a mussel, shell and all, unbroken. Their flesh is not fit to eat, so we only killed them when wanting specimens. The country people only know them by the name of the "narrow-billed duck," to distinguish them from the true ducks. Armstrong gives *sioltaiche* as their name, though I never heard it used.

Red-breasted Merganser.

Norse, Smä skraka.

Is the more abundant kind of the two species, being, in fact, our common goosander. A very pretty sight they make in some rock-

embosomed creek, a party of some half-dozen, including one splendid male. At one time they float upon their own reflections imaged in the dark blue water; then, as if by word of command, they all leap down together into the depths below. After a minute's interval, up they pop to the surface, emerging with great buoyancy. They are now a little scattered, so they converge upon their gallant admiral, whose bright, parti-coloured plumage is further set off by the rich, soft shades of chestnut which form their own colouring. They advance with great swiftness through the waters, without any visible effort or motion of any part of the body. The long, slender neck is kept erect and motionless, except to turn the head and long coral bill gracefully round, as the bird looks about, suspicious of lurking danger.

The Divers.

We are best acquainted with the divers in their sombre and unattractive winter plumage, in which they are known as the loon, the ember or immer goose, the rain goose, the lough diver, &c. All through the winter months they are frequently to be met with on our seas, where their great bulk forms a conspicuous feature. In their beautiful breeding dress they are rarely seen—the black-throat seldom or never, the red-throat but seldom, but the great northern not unfrequently.

The Black-throated Diver and Red-throated Diver.

Gaelic, Learg, which also means the sea or surface of the sea. The same word, however, means a sloping, green field or eminence, which, in the names of places, is Anglicised into Largs, Larrigs, Largie, &c. The same name is sometimes applied to the large black cormorant. *Norse*, Stor-loni and the Smä-loni—the great and lesser loon.

We sometimes shoot these when diving near the shore. The very long time they remain down makes it easy to take a long run down to them, though they often rise a long way out of shot.

The Great Northern Diver.

Gaelic, Bun-bhuachaille—the herdsman of the deep or bottom, which, among the men of the mainland (about Lochgilphead), is rendered mur-bhuachaille—the herdsman of the sea. To English ideas the former name would be written boon-ya-voo-achail. *Norse*, Is-loni—ice loon.

This splendid inhabitant of the deep is by no means uncommon around our isles through winter, and whenever we meet him we imme-

diately give chase, and often successfully, for, though diving at the first approach of the boat, he will often rise within shot, if headed with judgment. If once seriously alarmed and bent upon escape, he will, of course, distance the swiftest boat in no time, remaining an almost incredible time under water; but he never takes wing, as the two smaller divers will do when hard pressed. In this way the great northern gives good sport, and offers an irresistible temptation for pursuit, though we hardly ever attempted to eat him when captured, though I have tried it cold and *skinned*, instead of plucked, which is the best way of treating sea-birds of doubtful edibility. The skin, as a trophy, constitutes its only value, but it has to undergo a very thorough cleansing, as the body is encased in such a layer of fat, adhering to the skin almost like blubber. In June they have all disappeared, except a few laggards, who then become no small prize, being in their splendid and remarkable breeding plumage of summer, which presents a striking contrast in colour and peculiar markings to the dull grey uniform of winter. The irides are also of a fiery red, like carbuncles. The voice is a loud, prolonged shout, like a hoarse bray, which is said to forbode the approach of a storm. C. M'Vean says that the people of the outer islands believe it breeds there, and the very early appearance of the young one in company with the parent bird seems to corroborate the belief.

The Sclavonian Grebe.

Though I never met this bird among the isles, I became familiar with it at Lochgilphead, where it comes in small parties in the month of March, remaining in the loch during the whole of that month on their northerly migration. They are then in full summer plumage, evidently going in pairs, though a number of these keep together, forming a little society while halting in our waters. They employ themselves all day long diving and fishing very actively, taking very long dives, and reappearing a vast distance from where they plunge. This peculiarity alone makes them difficult to shoot, as they are not at all shy of the shore, though they are of a boat, at the approach of which they are always ready to fly. I have shot these birds both in summer and winter plumage on the lakes and rivers of Canada, where

they go by the suggestive name of *hell-divers*. The middle of March is the time to look for them in Loch Gilp, and bad weather will keep them as late as the first week of April.

The Little Grebe.

Gaelic, Spog-ri-toin. Paw at the breech or breech paws—a very descriptive name. *Norwegian*, Smä dopping—small diver.

This funny little bird exists on most of the fresh-water lochans, even of remote Tiree, and breeds on the moors. It is also frequently found in salt water where the sea runs into land-locked creeks and narrow sounds, such as divide Ulva from Mull, and the upper reaches of Loch Swein, where the tidal waters of the ocean wander among heather-clad rocks and sweep the roots of mountain ash and birch clumps, so interwoven is land and sea in this remarkable loch, which even moved the saturnine Macculloch to rapture. It seems as if the limits of the contesting elements had never been clearly defined since the period of the deluge.

It was here I saw the grebe trying to conceal himself in the clear, bright water beneath the high rock on which I stood. He floated with his whole body submerged in an upright position, his bill alone exposed above water, in which position I shot straight down upon him, and his lifeless body sprung to the surface buoyant as an air bubble. These birds always try to escape by diving, though I have often seen them take wing, and so quick are they as easily to dive at the snap of the cap, making them very difficult to shoot.

The Common Guillemot.

Gaelic, Eun du' na sgadain—the black herring bird.

All the isles that are surrounded by basaltic cliffs, as well as the stupendous iron-bound coast of South and West Mull, are the breeding places of myriads of guillemots, which literally blacken the surface of the sea surrounding them. Actively employed fishing all day, towards evening they stream homewards in an endless string—a river of birds. Their flight is extremely swift, and in an undeviatingly straight line about ten feet above the water, so much so that they often threaten to go dash through any sail that may happen to cross their line of flight;

not that I ever actually saw them do so, as by an insensible deviation right or left they just clear any such obstruction. Of course they may be killed in any numbers, either on their nesting places, where their insensibility to danger has procured them the name of the "foolish guillemot," or when studding the water in countless thousands, where several may be strung at one shot, as they do not offer to dive till approached very near, and their mode of diving is slow compared with the active *headers* the cormorants take, or the lightning-like disappearance of the larger divers.

They propel themselves under water with their wings, a submarine flight, which commences in the act of diving, as the wings begin to open before the bird leaves the surface, while all other birds dive with their wings tight closed. The flesh of the guillemot is but poor eating. Sussex fishermen shoot them under Beachy Head, where they breed, and make them into pies, under the name of willocks or willies.

The Bridled Guillemot.[1]

Norwegian, Sill gripla—the herring gripla.

This is generally considered a rare bird. Sir William Jardine, in *The Naturalists' Library*, says there is no recorded instance of the capture of a specimen in Scotland, though later observers declare it to be well known to the inhabitants of the outer isles. The first one that I procured I sent to a bird-stuffer in Edinburgh, who corresponded with Selby, and forwarded it to that eminent ornithologist. He, in his reply, said that it was a specimen of that "unusual bird in Scotland, the bridled guillemot." It may be more abundant than we think, for the difference between it and the common bird is not distinguishable until captured, and we did not care to shoot guillemots in great numbers; but if we killed as many as a dozen in a day we should probably find one *lacrymans* among the lot. The common guillemot has a mark or division in the close texture of the feathers from behind the eye, extending down the neck; in the bridled this is further marked

[1] As has been pointed out elsewhere, the average number of bridled birds may be taken at from one in six or seven, to one in ten or twelve of the common form. Needless now to insist upon the fact that the common and bridled birds have long been looked upon as belonging to the same species, as indeed is acknowledged amongst the communities themselves.—Ed.

by a white line, which also encircles the eye; there is besides a slight difference in the tint and shape of the bird, which is only observable when the two varieties lie side by side.

The Black Guillemot.

Norse, Tobis gripla.

Though the common guillemot rears but one young one, and this bird rears three, yet it is infinitely less numerous; nor is it a gregarious bird, though to a certain extent it is migratory. It is usually found solitary, or swimming in pairs, on the wildest and most rocky parts of our coast, utterly regardless of the dreadful surf tumbling in white cascades off the jagged rocks when the heavy swell of ocean heaves downwards. The black guillemot is a very pretty and interesting little bird, quite tame, allowing a close approach by boat. Its plumage undergoes an extraordinary seasonal change, so that in spring and autumn two birds will not be found exactly alike, its colours ranging through every shade of grey, from white, speckled, piebald, to jet black, with a shining green lustre. In its nearly pure white winter dress, the name of black guillemot is an evident misnomer, and that of doveky or Greenland dove is much more applicable. It is remarkable that at such seasons birds should be found both in complete summer and perfect winter plumage. I should imagine that the former had been wintering in the south and had never assumed the winter garb. In intensely severe weather, in the depth of winter, the most purely white specimens are to be procured. They breed on all the smaller uninhabited islands, in holes under the rocks very little above the water-mark, whence I have often extracted the little black downy young ones, and have reared them on small fry, for which they are very clamorous, uttering a querulous, impatient cry, unlike the adults, which are mute. When fledged, the young are dingy black above and dirty white underneath; the white speculum on the wing is clouded with black specks; and the legs, which in the old birds are a vivid coral red, are a dull reddish brown. The black guillemot is comparatively rarely seen to fly, but dives boldly in the wildest broken water. It is better eating than the common guillemot.

Among the isles it is known as the *carlag*, which means a tuft of wool, a descriptive name when in its winter plumage. *Càileag*, as it is sometimes pronounced, would signify a tame, good-tempered little

thing, also applicable to the confiding, plump, little round bird. The Welsh call him *casgan long*—the sailor's hatred, from a notion that their appearance forebodes a storm. *Casg* in Gaelic is to stop, and *long* is a ship.

The Little Auk.

Norwegian, Sjö kung—the sea king.

Seems quite unknown on our western shores. I never saw a specimen, though always on the look-out for it.

The Razorbill Auk.

Norwegian, Tord mulla.

The same remarks as those made on the common guillemot are applicable to the razorbill, coming at the same season, breeding on the same cliffs, and covering the same seas in a manner exactly similar to them. Like the former, it also totally disappears with the termination of the breeding season. Specimens in winter plumage are only rarely met with, and usually as weather-beaten, storm-stressed stragglers, crippled or half-starved after severe tempests. They are by no means silent birds; their hoarse croaks are borne along the smooth surface of the calm sea to a great distance, as they keep calling to each other while fishing, and may be heard while the birds are too far off to be discernible from a boat. Their cries are often to be heard during calm, moonlight nights after the hatching is over in August, and when each old bird is followed by a little one, which it seems to be instructing in the art of diving.

The Puffin.

Gaelic, Seamas rua' (pronounced shame-us rua)—Red James.
Norwegian, Lunne fogel.

Is another of those summer visitors who pour out their thousands upon our sea-girt shores, so beautifully alluded to by Thomson as

> "Where the Northern Ocean in vast whirls
> Boils round the naked melancholy isles
> Of furthest Thule, and the Atlantic surge
> Pours in amongst the stormy Hebrides.
> Who can recount what transmigrations there
> Are annual made? What nations come and go?
> And how the living clouds on clouds arise
> Infinite wings! Till all the plume dark air
> And rude resounding shores are one wild cry."

As their mode of nesting differs from the guillemot's and razorbill's, they are more local in their choice of breeding places. Many of the islands, however, provide suitable spots for them; some, like Staffa, in holes and crannies of the rock; others are crowned by banks of soft, unctious soil, grown over with grass and sea-pink, which are honeycombed by burrows of the puffins which have inhabited them for generations, and have reared their young within sound of the ceaseless roaring of the surf which ever rolls under the feet of the frightful overhanging crags. When intruded upon in these their dangerous haunts, they show little signs of timidity. The old birds remain sitting on their eggs, with their grotesque faces and formidable bills protruding from the doors of their holes, prepared to guard their nest and administer a most formidable bite to any intrusive fingers. Others continue flying uneasily past the intruders, which they do in a very swift and undeviating line of flight, their wings vibrating with insect-like rapidity, their red legs and paws sticking out behind, wide spread, in a most ungraceful fashion. They sweep past, close along the face of the cliff, within a few feet of the visitors; then, swooping out seaward, they make a circuit, and so pass and repass again and again. This they all do in the same direction (with or against the sun), and they never cease all the time you remain, giving the appearance of an aerial puffin procession. They never, however, come actually *over* the land, so that though any amount may be shot, they all go whirling down the abyss into the ocean beneath, where they may be picked up by your comrade in the boat. They are certainly the most eatable of their tribe, and in St Kilda form an important part of the islander's sustenance. At Lochgilphead I saw little of the puffin, though they came early in May in thousands, which scattered themselves over Loch Fyne, all disappearing by the end of the month. These were only a division of the grand army progressing north. At this time I often observed them towards evening fly in small flocks right up Loch Gilp; then, reaching its head, they make a sweep round it, and stand out to sea again. At this point Loch Fyne branches out into two arms like the letter Y. One runs up thirty miles to Inveraray; the other, a truncated one only of three miles, now terminates at Lochgilphead, but before the pre-historic fall of the sea-level ran through Glen Crinan and joined the Western Ocean. Engineering has re-united it by means of the Crinan Canal, but it seems to me that the puffin's instinct for-

bids them to fly across the few intervening miles of dry land, and the attempts of these pioneering parties at discovering a north-west sea passage are futile, and so the great host must turn south again to double the Mull of Cantyre.[1] I have reared the young puffins successfully; one became very tame and attempted to follow me. He was unmolested by cats or dogs when he waddled about, as they had a proper respect for his tremendous bill. Before he entirely lost all his down, his appearance was, if possible, more comical, as a tuft adhered to his head like a chancellor's wig.

The Common Cormorant.

Though pretty frequent, is so much less abundant than the green species that I need do no more than just mention that the bird is well known to us in every stage—the dingy-black small birds of the year, and the great old birds, with the remarkable white patch on the thigh and cheek, when they are known to us as *leargs*.

The Green-crested Cormorant.

Gaelic, Scarbh (pronounced scarrav), whence the Scotch scart. *Danish*, Skarv. *Norwegian*, Stor-skarf or great scart, for the black, and topp-scarf or ällkräka, eel crow, for the green cormorant.

The whole year round this is by far the most plentiful of all our water-fowl, and giving us capital sport, whether we pursue him on the water or stalk him from the land, and he is of very excellent value for the larder.

The green cormorants breed abundantly in all the great sea caves, as well as in holes and ledges in the cliffs surrounding Staffa and the stupendous headlands of Barg and Gribun. In fact, most islands or districts have their *na scarbh*—scart's cave—where the green cormorants find a breeding place, and a habitual roosting place all the rest of the year. Such haunts may best be described by an extract from my friend Mr Keddie's *Staffa and Iona*, who visited the green cormorant's cave:—"Being excavated in the lower conglomerate rock, the sides of

[1] We consider this observation, and the accompanying remarks by Mr Graham, to be most interesting from a migrational point of view, more especially as having been written so many years before that subject was treated of by Herr Weissman in *The Contemporary Review;* studied by Herr Gätke in Heligoland; or taken up by the Migrational Committee of the British Association.—Ed.

the interior are smooth and destitute of the orderly and elegant forms which produce so powerful an effect in Fingal's Cave. The interior, however, is not without a certain kind of impressive grandeur, arising less from a sense of magnitude than from the sombre depth of shade in some parts of the cave, contrasting with the pleasing effects of the light thrown in upon others. In some of the recesses the gloom is so deep that the movement of the oar excites the phosphorescent gleam of the floating medusæ, as in the sea during the darkness of night. The vaulted roof echoes to the slightest sound, and reverberates like thunder to the discharge of firearms. The crevices of the rock are the resort of the cormorant, which, during the season of incubation, is seen with its dusky form, crested poll, yellow face, and hooked bill, sitting with imperturbable gravity on its eggs, or watching its callow young amidst such a scene of confusion and excitement as we have witnessed in the cave when its solitude was invaded by a party of adventurous sportsmen, and the echoes rang to the quick discharge of their fowling-pieces, when the firm-footed islanders clambered to dizzy heights to bring down the prey from the crags, and shouting boatmen strove with oar and boat-hook to secure some wounded bird as it swooped down from the rocks into the water and struggled for dear life."

The proper season for visiting these caves is when the young are full-fledged, fat, and strong; and the proper time is just before sunset, for the scart is an early bird, and before the sun has dipped they come streaming home from their fishing grounds to roost the night within the gloomy recesses of their favourite caves, and may be waylaid at the entrance. Before coming home for the night their favourite habit is to rest themselves, perched on an isolated rock, not much raised above the level of the waves which surround it, and sit in small parties, still, sombre, and sedate, perfectly upright, so as to look like rows of long-necked black bottles basking in the last rays of the sinking sun. At such a time you may sail down upon them, keeping very still and quiet in the boat. As she begins to get within range, the gloomy, imperturbable coterie show signs of uneasiness by writhing and twisting their necks, gazing with alternate eyes, and shuffling nearer the edge of the rock, but still they hold their ground till the fatal discharge rings out over the water, and in the twinkling of an eye the whole lot drop as one bird plumb into the water, without making splash or ripple. When this happens for the first time to a stranger, it brings

forth the amazed exclamation of "By Jove! I've killed them all!" The more experienced hand only loads up as quickly as possible and stands on the look-out. Half-a-minute more, and up pop the long black necks in scattered clumps, some within shot and some beyond, which spread their sable pinions and fly away, while one or more wounded birds rise bleeding near the boat, and have to be secured, though not without a struggle, for they are wonderfully tenacious of life, and a wounded scart will often give a most arduous chase before receiving the *coup de grace*. One does not like to leave a wounded bird, and sometimes hunting a winged scart is very exciting—the cunning bird diving purposely into broken water, doubling behind rocks, dodging round and round them, but, worst of all, diving at the snap of the cap, so that many shots are fired at him in vain. At last he may disappear altogether in a mysterious manner, and never be seen again. This has repeatedly happened to me, and sometimes in clear, open, perfectly calm water, far from land, and with enough pair of sharp and practised eyes to watch all round so that nothing could rise to the surface without being detected. The conclusion at which I arrived was that the despairing and exhausted creature, driven to the last extremity, perished with the tangle or weed at the bottom in his death grasp, which he holds to retain himself submerged when his own unaided exertions are no longer capable of keeping himself under water out of reach of his pursuers. In perfectly calm weather the scart may often be successfully chased by rowing, and heading him as he dives. In the evening he is often so gorged as to be incapable of flying until he has emptied his crop of its superfluous load, and the object then is to press him so hard as not to give him time to disgorge, which such a proverbially greedy creature as a cormorant is loth to do until it becomes a question of giving up his life or giving up his supper. With a light breeze, it is best to sail down the wind upon them, as it gives the boat most way, and as they must rise against the wind, they are forced, if they rise, to fly towards the boat. In winter, we usually get the scart by stalking them from the rocks as they dive along the coast. At this time we get great numbers of the young black cormorants of the first year. They are distinguished from the green by their colour, which is dingy-black above and brownish-grey beneath, and the eyes, which are hazel-brown. The young green scarts are fine jet black, and have emerald green eyes. As we get few adult black cormorants, we suppose that they do not

affect our coasts for breeding purposes. I have now dwelt at sufficient length upon the how-to-catch your cormorant. I must now say a word of how to deal with him when caught. There seems an extraordinary prejudice against him as an article of food—very ungrounded. In little, old-fashioned books on birds, such passages are common as, "The cormorant is the most offensively rank of all the feathered creation. Even the Greenlanders, who consider rancid blubber and train oil a luxury, refuse to eat the flesh of the cormorant as too disgusting." Now, from many years' experience, corroborated by my most fastidious friends and *bon-vivants*, who have tried the experiment, I aver that a couple of scarts are equal to a good plump hare. As a proof of this, I have heard a gentleman of property in the islands say to his gamekeeper, "Donald, the mistress expects a friend to dinner to-day, so you must bring home a hare or a couple of scarts." And I have proceeded to help him in his mission by accompanying him in a boat and landing him on a sea rock, where he remained concealed, while I took the boat away to a little distance. A scart would soon come flying past, and be duly knocked over; this was picked up and stuck upright on the summit of the rock with the aid of a few sticks as props, and now a continual succession of scarts would be decoyed in their flight past to hover over their unconscious comrade within range of the concealed guns. In this way we soon got as many as we required, and divided the spoil to take home. The scarts should now be hung for a week or more, according to the weather, then skinned, and treated exactly like a hare, for making that pride of the Scottish *cuisine*—hare soup. Any good recipe for making this should be exactly followed.

The Solan Goose.

Only appears from time to time in considerable parties, which remain fishing in our neighbourhood for a longer or shorter period, according to their success in fishing. A party of gannets actively at work fishing is a very beautiful sight, especially in the slanting rays of an evening sun, which illumines the magnificent stretch of their vast pinions, and flash upon the white spurt of foam which dashes up, like the ricochet of a cannon ball, as the bird makes his plunge of forty or sixty feet, like a shining meteor or white thunderbolt dropping from the sky. Though unquestionably the noblest of our water-fowl, not even excepting the swan, yet he is of no value for the pot. It is the

only water bird we could not eat. It has a strong, rank smell peculiar to itself, and to the fulmar, storm petrel, and shearwater, which they never lose, even after the skin has been stuffed some years, and which clings to any pocket, bag, or box which has contained them. Some years ago a small crofter caught a solan goose near his cabin, which refused to fly away, and it was cooked and eaten. Soon after the man and his wife died, the servant girl was dangerously ill, and the cow, which had licked out the pot, either died or became very ill. The bird was no doubt poisoned. I once captured a young gannet in its first year's plumage, which made no attempt to escape. On examination, one leg was found swollen to three times its normal size, and full of dark, extravasated blood. The islanders call the bird *asan*, while the mainland name is *ansa* — apparently a corruption and transposition of anser; but the natives of St Kilda (one of the gannet's homes) name it *suilear*, from *suil*, the eye, in reference to its sharp sight. Its Scottish breeding places are the Bass Rock, Ailsa Craig, St Kilda, and Suliskeir (the gannet rock), thirty miles north of the Butt of Lewis.[1] The sulair is mentioned in the following St Kilda song, which I heard sung by a young lady well acquainted with the island and its people. She favoured me with this literal translation and its chorus, which, being supposed to be in the bird language, is, of course, untranslatable:—

"There are lofty mountains, and among the mountains, plains;
There dwell as lovely women as in the plains of the valleys,
With their dun-coloured plaids[2] and whitest of feet,
And if they obtain their wish, it is the birds they seek.[3]
And the famous men of my love, who climb the rude ascent
And wound the bird with their weapon, beyond the reach of lead,
And merrily descend the cliff to kill the sulair,
Great is the fame that surrounds you.
Chorus of birds—Ho-ro-iag o-wak o-iag-o,
Iri-iri-iag o-wak oro. Ho-ro-iag o-wak o-iag-o," &c.

[1] Suliskeir, near N. Rona, is the locality meant in the text, and is forty-one miles from Butt of Lewis. Another locality in addition to the above, is Stack, of the group "Stack and Skerry," also called Suliskerry, which may be held as belonging to the Orkney Islands, and perhaps is the breeding-place of the gannet, which is least often landed upon. As we have ourselves observed, this immunity from spoliation is most remarkably evidenced by the unusually large proportion there of immature birds.—Ed.

[2] St Kilda sheep are brown, and the cloth is made of their undyed wool.

[3] The puffin is caught in snares, which is considered the work of woman, while the men are engaged in the more arduous pursuit of the solan goose.

A tame solan I kept was the means of driving away a London friend by pecking his legs on the stairs, and by his villainous odour. Declining to destroy my ill-flavoured pet, he went off in a huff.

Armstrong gives *guga* as the Irish name.

The Manx Shearwater.

Though not very numerous, is often seen skimming over the ocean, rising and falling along the waves. They are found breeding in holes of the rock, laying a single white egg, blunt at both ends, and lustreless, like the puffin's and petrel's.[1] On some rare occasions I have met them covering the sea in considerable numbers about the approach of the breeding season, and they were then very tame, allowing the boat to approach them quite close. Usually, however, they are seldom at rest; they come skimming up to the boat as if led by curiosity, and then glide swiftly away again.

The Stormy Petrel.

Gaelic, Luchd fairge (pronounced luke farragy), or sea mouse.

In my former letters I have described my experiences of this most interesting little bird in pp. 78 and 213 of *The Naturalist.* I will only repeat that they breed in the islands—in Staffa, under the large loose stones on the beach; in the islet of Soay, in burrows formed in the soft soil—and devote a great portion of the year to the rearing of their single fledgling. As they come to their holes in the beginning of June and in the middle of October, many of the young seem but recently hatched, and but little advanced towards being fledged.

Armstrong makes the following mention of them :—"Shaw observes of these sea-fowls that they go into holes like mice, and that when they are taken a quantity of yellow oil falls from their bill. It has been remarked of them that they hatch their young by sitting on the ground about six inches from their eggs, and, turning their heads toward them, make a cooing noise called *gur-le-gùg*—'hatch with a

[1] Our experience is rather opposed to our author's in regard to the lustreless character of the Manx shearwater's egg. It is blunt at each end, but is much glossier, whiter, and thinner-shelled than a puffin's.—Ed.

song'—day and night till they are hatched. They are found in vast numbers in the isle of Staffa and throughout the Hebrides."

This is very correct, though I never heard the cooing noise by day, though often in the evening; it is rather a *purring* noise, broken by an occasional *click*. When its nest is opened up, the bird is usually found cowering a few inches away from its egg, and, when handled, spurts up the oil—clearer and more plenteous early in the season.

The Fulmar.

Norwegian, Storm fogel.

I never saw a live fulmar to my knowledge, but I have at different times picked up three specimens very recently dead, quite fresh enough to make drawings of, though too much damaged by knocking about among the waves to be worth preserving as a skin. The strong, peculiar smell alluded to in connection with the solan goose was as strong as ever in these drifting waifs; indeed, a single odd feather washed up on the beach retains it strong enough to show what bird it belonged to. The wings are very long and expansive, though they fold up in such a manner as not to extend beyond the tip of the tail when they are closed.

The Common Tern and Arctic Tern.

Norwegian, Fisk tärna, common tern. Röd näbbed tärna, Arctic tern.

The name of sea swallow is the most applicable to these elegant ocean martlets, not only on account of their long, sharp-pointed wings and forked tails, but because they are also the harbingers of spring to the inhabitants of the coast, as the land swallow is to those of the fields and groves; and so sure as I hear their shrill, vixenish screams, and see the long stroked flight of their sharp wings, so sure do I know that the 12th of May has come or gone, for their arrival is punctual to the day. I have no doubt that there are among the clouds of terns which then arrive representatives of the many other less frequent varieties, but I am obliged to acknowledge that I never took much pains to search them out; indeed, when our tardy and short-lived summer does arrive, we have so many occupations, amusements, and engagements to be entered upon, that the fast-fleeting fine weather months always glide by, leaving many things unperformed. The two varieties which are abundant are the Arctic and the common tern, in

the proportion of about ten of the former to one of the latter. Almost immediately on arrival the process of incubation is commenced. The spots they select are the numerous steep, rocky islets—*stacks*, as they are called—which in winter are almost continually submerged by the awful seas rolling in from the Atlantic—

> "The tumbling surf that buries
> The Orkwegian skerries,
> Answering the hoarse Hebrides,"

but which are now literally covered by the nests of these halcyons of the ocean. When these rocks are visited the white-winged birds rise up in clouds, filling the air with their shrill, angry clamour, hovering, wheeling, and darting at the molesters of their nests, almost striking them with their wings, exhibiting every sign of rage both in voice and action, and so daring in their approach as to let us knock them down with a stick or boat-hook. Undeterred by all this show of resistance, we would quickly strip the nests, filling bonnets and baling-dishes, or any available vessel with the spoil, consisting of olive-green, brown-blotched eggs, smaller than plovers', and excellent eating, boiled hard and eaten cold; and this we did without any feelings of compunction, knowing that the nests will quickly be replenished, which a few days of stiff westerly wind, rendering their surf-bound citadels secure against marauders, will enable them to hatch undisturbed. These exciting egg raids, carried out by a merry party in piratical boats, armed and provisioned for a long day's cruise among the distant isles, remain as bright pictures in the memory, encircled by a luminous halo of happy reminiscences, which will often conjure themselves up in after years with all the vivid distinctness and minutiæ of a coloured photograph or dissolving view. The eggs and nest, in appearance and situation, are exactly similar to the gull's in miniature, and very quickly after emerging from the egg the little downy chicks learn to run upon the crags with a marvellous precocity of activity and cunning in dodging and hiding among the clefts and crannies, setting pursuit at defiance. Their island name is *stearnal*.

The Black-headed Gull.

We are not familiar with him in his black cap or summer dress, as there is no breeding place very near us. The only one I happen to

know of is on the shores of West Loch Tarbert, on the mainland of Argyll, in Kintyre. But in winter, without the black head, they are very numerous among the great flocks of other gulls which feed along the shore, pick up the refuse of the fishing-boats, and hover over the plough in search of worms. The sharp-pointed wing and absence of black tip and white line down its exterior margin make it easily distinguishable from the other members of the tribe.

The Great Black-backed Gull.

Norwegian, Häfs trut, or prost—the priest.

This huge bird, the giant of the gull tribe, cannot be called a common bird as gulls go, though they may be very frequently seen either singly or in pairs, when their enormous size and vast stretch of wing cannot fail to command attention, even from the most indifferent spectator, as an imposing object in a marine landscape.

His voice is a mighty shout, which has a startling effect on the solitary seashore when all is calm, still, and silent around, when uttered suddenly and unexpectedly, as the bird often does, at the approach of a stranger. After challenging him with this first rude salute, he goes off into an angry, discordant *cackle, cackle, cackle*, in a remonstrative tone, as of a grumbling giant, and is one of those many strange wild sounds so familiar to the frequenter of the seashore, so connected with, and adding so much to, the general effect of scenes which address themselves to every sense and faculty, both of body and mind. I never found their nest or eggs, and they do not seem to consort with their smaller brethren, either when nesting or in their ordinary pursuit of daily food.

The Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Norwegian, Sill mäse—herring gull.

Though we call this the *little* black-back, familiarly to distinguish him from the last much bigger bird, yet he really is a very fine large bird, with a powerful voice and great sweep of wing. His plumage is exactly similar to the other—that is, pure white, with black mantle and wings powerfully contrasting with each other, the bill and legs bright yellow, as are the irides, with scarlet eyelids. Its black-and-

white colouring gives it the name of the parson among the south coast English fishermen. We find this gull breeding on the flat, marshy summits of all the lesser islands, where the nests, mere hollows lined with a little sea-pink, are so thick together as to make it difficult to avoid treading upon them. If we find three eggs laid together, we are rather shy of taking them, as that is the full complement, and so may be in progress of hatching. When we find but one or two eggs, we of course take them and put them to the ordeal at the first convenient *dub* of rain-water. All that sink are *spolia opima;* those that float, when we cannot return them to their nests, are flung over the edge of the cliff, if possible in the direction of the patient boat-keeper some giddy fathoms down, whose nut-shell charge is the slender connecting link between you and the rest of the world. Meanwhile the clamour overhead is frightful; you cannot make your comrade hear though you shout in his ear. The enraged birds dash at your head, and your dogs slink at your heels with lowered crest and tail, as if ashamed of being cowed by mere vociferous birds.

In the spring, when the fields are newly sown, the lesser blackbacks, then in pairs, may be often found feasting on the seed corn, in company with rock doves and other birds, and though they are shy and difficult of approach, they are then tolerably eatable.

The Herring Gull.

Gaelic, Faoileann (pronounced feulin); faoile is gentle, kind, mild. The young and immature birds so sought for by boys to keep as pets are called *sglinrach* —a slut, a slattern, a trollop. *Norwegian,* Grä trut.

Is another fine, large, powerful bird, still more abundant than the last, and to be met with in great numbers along the shores at all times of the year, and breeding upon the same islets as the last, though the position of the nest is rather different, being built on clefts and inaccessible ledges of the cliffs and precipices, instead of upon the flat tableland on the summit of the island. It lays the same number of three eggs, also of the same size and colour, which are equally sought for.

On some of these small islands boats' crews of fishermen take up their quarters for the summer, erecting huts and tents for sleeping in, and they trust for their support very materially upon the gulls' eggs which they can collect, eked out with the little oatmeal they bring with them. I have often joined in gathering this harvest of eggs, landing

upon the rough, tall, surf-surrounded stacks, climbing barefoot along the giddy heights, and bringing home whole hampers of eggs, in which we not only revel for some time after, but preserve, so as to be available for salad and other such purposes even up to winter. *Apropos* of *giddy* heights, I may give my experience as an old sailor and top-midshipman for the usual number of years, that mere *height* has nothing to do with the feeling of giddiness, but it is the feeling of *insecurity*. As to height, who could wish to be much higher than seated on the (say) main-royal yard of a line-of-battle ship, where, with his one arm looped round the *lift* (a good stout piece of man-of-war's rope), a look-out man feels as secure as if seated in an arm-chair, with his three other limbs free for any other use; but let him hear the order far down below on deck of "Let fly royal sheets and halliards" by some officer so careless as not to observe a man in his position, and his sense of danger would immediately produce a dizzy qualm such as we call giddiness. I have often been hanging on the face of a beetling crag without the least such feeling, until a loose stone which I grip, and about to throw my whole weight on, gives way, crumbles into fragments, and goes rattling down the deep profound, till the noise grows faint in the distance, and then such an unpleasant sensation seizes one somewhere about the pit of the stomach, something between vertigo and sea-sickness, or intense giddiness, which, if not manfully overcome, would infallibly send one toppling down headlong with palsied, nerveless limbs. Meanwhile the gulls, disturbed by the intrusion of the egg-hunters, dash about like angry hornets, filling the air with their clamorous rage, adding very much to the danger of the climber's position if he allows their threatening appearance to affect his nerves. I have sometimes left a town-bred visitor, who chose rather to accept the post of boat-keeper to risking his neck in the perilous rude ascent, and on my return have found him much discomfited by the audacity of the enraged birds, who actually cuffed his ears with their wings. One declared he would never be left in such a position again alone, at least without a loaded gun; "they used such dreadful language and such threatening gestures," he said, "that though I retorted by shouting out opprobrious epithets at them, and whirling the boat-hook round my head, yet I felt persuaded that they would soon have dragged me out of the boat." He amused us further by adding that at last they used the most extraordinary artillery in

the height of the excitement—they actually laid a volley of eggs in mid-air over his devoted head, which descended into the water around him in a perfect shower! Of course he was evidently ignorant of our habit of throwing the refuse eggs over the cliff when returning to the boat.

The half-fledged gulls are easily reared, and become very useful garden scavengers. Their wings need not be kept clipped, as they become so attached to their domicile as never to fly entirely away. A tame black-back (a female) lived many years with an Iona farmer. It regularly disappeared at the commencement of the breeding season, and did not reappear till it was entirely concluded, after having no doubt reared a brood on one of the neighbouring islands. From this I should suppose that their matrimonial engagements only last for one season, and that they do not remain mated for life, though the great black-backs, which are less gregarious than the smaller gulls, seem to go in pairs at all times of the year. The immature plumage of the gulls is a mottled grey and dark brown, bills black, legs livid, and irides hazel, the tail marked by a broad band of black, which it retains till the whole of the rest of the plumage has gradually assumed the pure hues of adult age. In this state they are known as *wagels*.

The Common Gull.

Norwegian, Fiske mäse—fish gull.

It need only be said that this lesser gull exists in vast quantities about our shores, breeding in the same places as the larger gulls, affecting ledges and clefts, like the herring gull, for the site of its nest.

The Kittiwake.

Norwegian, Tre taig mäse—three-toed gull.

Comes to us in great flocks for the summer, breeding on all the islands, and fishing along the shore in company with the other gulls. Among other places it nestles above the huge portals of the great Cave of Fingal, at Staffa, and, as the startled birds rise in flocks when disturbed by the arrival of the summer steamboat, they amuse the visitors by their vociferous iteration of their own name—*kittiwake! kitty-wake!*—which they all keep screaming out in unison, till the air resounds with

the shrill anthem, rising and falling to the deep, rumbling growl of the surges in the cavern's profundity, which forms a fitting bass to such wild psalmody of Nature's wildest children.

The island of Jura (Duir-ey), so called by the Northmen from the abundance of deer they found upon its wild hills and barren heaths, still keeps up its repute as one of the best deer forests in Scotland; but the deerstalkers are sadly annoyed by vast colonies of myriads of gulls, which monopolise a large tract as a breeding ground, by the clamour which they make at sight of any human being, and so giving the alarm to the wary quadrupeds. An exterminating warfare was consequently carried on against them at one time, but without any good result; for while their numbers could not sensibly be affected, it increased their vigilance and noise to such an extent that subsequently different tactics were employed, and they were left undisturbed and unmolested, so that they might become tamer and less liable to resent intrusion when they found that it was not directed against themselves. In a very old edition of *The British Encyclopædia*, this island is mentioned as being similarly colonised by hordes of skuas; but these birds have long quitted it, and is now but a sparse visitant to our seas.[1]

The Arctic Skua.

Norwegian, Labbe.

This is not a very common bird around our inner islands, though it may occasionally be seen scudding over the waves in pursuit of the gulls, or quietly floating on the surface, looking like a nearly black gull. The usual one seems to be Richardson's skua. Of the latter he reared a young bird taken from a nest among a colony of these birds on Stuala island, Uist. Our boatmen are well acquainted with the skua under the name of *fasgadair*, which they usually mention with a sort of contemptuous grin, perhaps from the popular notion which caused Linnæus to name it the *Larus parasitus*, or dung-hunter, as it is called by some old writers, who say "this foul and sordid bird pursues the lesser gulls till they occasion them to moot through fear, when it greedily devours the excrement before it reaches the water."

Armstrong, however, in his Dictionary, mentions the *fasgadair* as

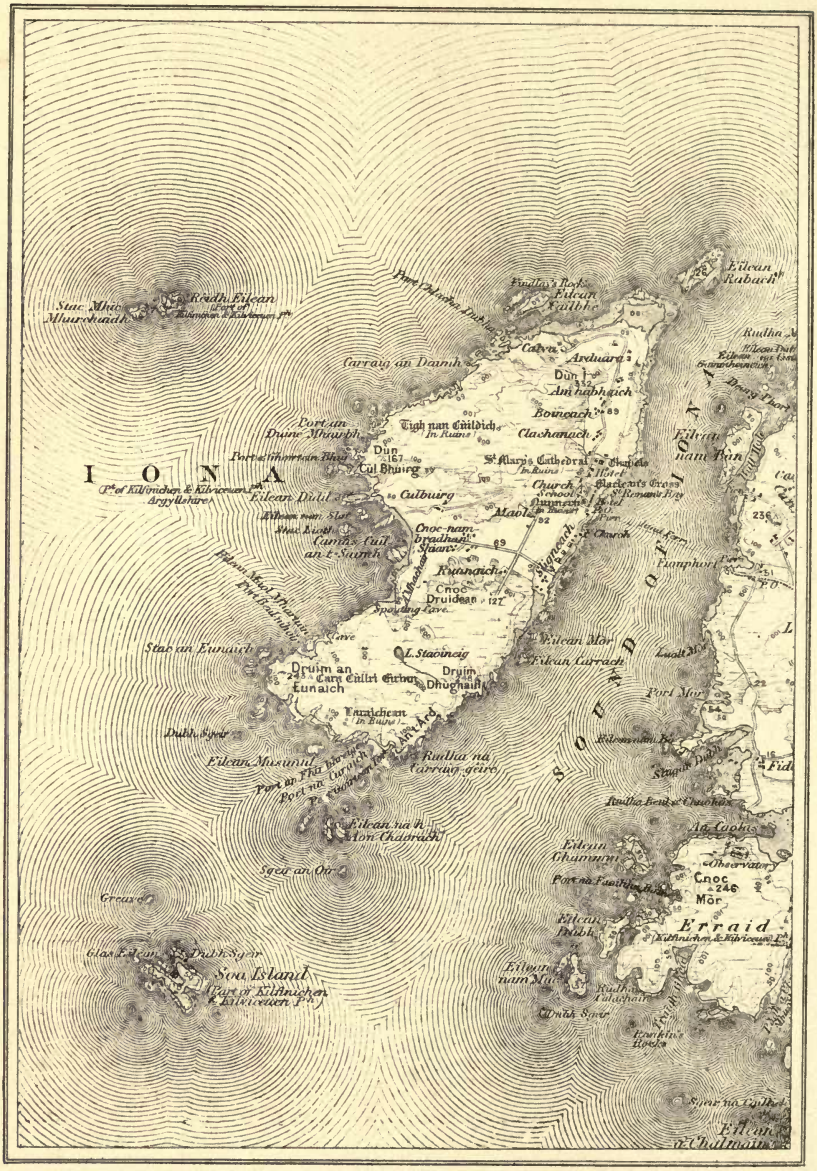
[1] But a few have since returned.—Ed.

"a Lewis bird the size of a gull, which flies with great velocity. When it observes the smaller gulls with food in their bills, it immediately pursues them so closely as to cause them to drop what they have got, which it easily catches before it reaches the ground."

The Glaucous Gull.

C. M'Vean and I watched a gull through a telescope, which we supposed to be a glaucous gull—a large gull, white-tipped wings—feeding on the carcase of a dog or a lamb cast up on the shore.

APPENDIX.


I O N A
Pt of Kilfinichen & Kilvicewen
Argyllshire
Carraig an Deamh
Port an Duine Mhuirich
Tigh nan Caildich
In Ruins
Dun
Cul Bhuirg
Culburg
Eilean Dubh
Eilean nam Stac
Shut Rock
Carn a Cuil an t-Sruith
Cnoc nam bradhan Stone
Kuanach
Cnoc Druidean
Spouting Cave
Maol
Church
Stac an Eunaich
Druim an Carn Eunaich
Druim Dhughain
Eunaichean
Dubh Sgeir
Eilean Musunil
Port an Fhir Liobhain
Port na Curraich
Rudha na Carraig geire
Eilean na h Aon Chaorach
Sgeir an Oir
Creag a'
Glas Eilean
Dubh Sgeir
Sea Island
Pass of Kilfinichen
& Kilvicewen
Eilean Rubach
Findlay's Rock
Eilean Raibhe
Calva
Ardnard
Dun
Aninabhaich
Bouncach
Clachanach
Eilean nam Ban
St Mary's Cathedral
In Ruins
Church
School
Dunmore
Blackcart's Grave
St Ronan's Bay
Pier
Church
Eilean Mor
Eilean Carrach
Port Mor
Eilean Ghummi
Observatory
Port na Faoilinn
Cnoc Mor
Eilean Dubh
Erraid
Kilfinichen & Kilvicewen Pt
Eilean nam Muc
Rudha Talachain
Dubh Sgeir
Frankin's Rocks
Sgeir na Caillich
Eilean a' Chaolais
SOUND OF IONA

PLACE NAMES IN IONA.

Iona is written Ioua by Adamnan, who in sixty instances mentions Ioua.
Ioua insula, Colgan says, to which we have prefixed an H, and so render it Hia or Hya.
Tighearna writes it Ia, Iae, hIe, and hI ; also, Colaimcille.
Annals of Ulster, Ia, I, hI-coluim-cille.
Four Masters, hI, I. Irish MSS., Ia and hIi.
Latin mediæval MSS., Hu, Eo. Bede, Hii and Hiiensis.
Scottish MSS., Yi, Hy, Hi, I, I Columkyl, and later Iona.
On Iona tombstones, Hy and Y.
Modern Mull and Iona name, I (pronounced E), "the island."
General name, I-choluim-chille, "Isle of Colum of the cell."
"Iona was suggested by an error in writing, and confirmed by a supposed connection with one of Columba's names."—*Dr Reeves.*
Argyll, *Airer* district, *Gaidhail* of the Gael.
M'n'Abb, M'anEsbuig, M'anTsaigart, M'Pherson, M'Vicar.
Robhartaich, O'Roarty, O'Rafferty.
Toiseach, the beginning. "The title of a fourth grade of lord."—*M'Intosh.*
Tighearna, lord.

Aird, a point.
Aonaidh mōr, great cliff.
Aonaidh nan sruth, cliff of streams.
Bealach mōr, great gorge.
Beul buig, mouth of bag.
Blar buidhe, yellow field.
Buaile nan cailleach, fold of the women.
Caibeal muire, Mary's Chapel.
Carnan buidhe, yellow hill.
Carraig a chaolis, rock of the channel.
Carraig an daimh, rock of ox.
Carraig fada, long rock.
Carraig na fionaig, rock of crow.
Ceann an aird, head of hammer (*lord*, a hammer).
Ceann nan creige, head of rock.
Ceann t' sear, east head.
Cheapach, plot of tillage.
Chorr sgeir, left behind rock.
Clachanach, stony ground.
Clach staoin, reclining stone.
Cladh, cemetery.
Cnoc an t' suidhe, hill of the seat.
Cnoc liathan, broad hill.
Cnoc mōr, big hill.
Cnoc na cridhe, hill of fold.
Cnoc nan carnan, hill of cairns.
Corr eilean.
Creag ghrugaig, frowning rock.
Crois, crossan, a cross, crosses.
Draonain, blackthorn.
Druim, a ridge.
Dun bhuirg, hill of burg (*burg*, hill or cliff).

Dusgeir, black rock.
Eaglais mōr, big church.
Eala, a bier; also a swan.
Eilean bhreac, spotted island.
Eilean carradh, rocky island.
Eilean didil, island of affection.
Eilean slat, island of rods.
Eilean nan conn, island of dogs.
Eilean dunagan, island of knolls.
Farig, a fold, enclosure.
Farr bheann, front peak.
Fionn a phort, white port.
Garadh, a garden.
Gara geal, white garden.
Gart na liana, meadow field.
Glac, a dell.
Glas eilean, white isle.
Gleann mōr, great glen.
Goirtean, a garden.
Iomaire, a ridge.
Iomaire tachair, a ridge of causeway.
Lag, a hollow.
Laggan, little hollow.
Leachd, flagstone.
Liana mhōr, great meadow.
Loch salean, salt-water lake.
Loch nisge, fresh-water lake.
Lochan, little lake.
Machar, field, plain.
Maol, brow of a hill.
Maol nam manach, monk's brow of a hill.
Mhurlugh, beach ground.
Mur, sea.
Murlugh, sea inlet.
Poll tarbh, pool of the bull.
Port an duine marbh, port of the dead man.
Port clacha geal, port of white stones.
Port ban, white port.
Port na Frang, French port.
Port na muinter, people's port.
Port Ronain, St Ronan's port.
Reilig, burial ground.
Ru, a point, headland.
Ru na sliginnich, shelly port.
Saithrichean, ruins, sites.
Sgeir bheag, little rock.
Sgeir mōr, big rock.
Sgeir ruadh, red rock.
Sgor.
Sithean, fairy mound.
Sliabh meanach, middle hillside.
Sliabh siar, west hillside.
Sliganach, shelly.
Sloc, a hole, gully.
Sloc na bo duibh, hole of the black cow.
Sron, a nose, headland.
Sruth, stream, tide-way.
Stac, stack of rocks.
Stac liath, grey stack or rock.
Staonaig, sloping ground.
Straid, a street, a road.
Straid na marbh, way of the dead.
Teampull, temple.
Teanga, a tongue.
Tigh, a house.
T' na h-oise, well of age.
Tobar, a well.
Tobar Maire, Mary's well.
Tobar a cheathain (*toper a ceann*), well of the showers.
Tonn, a wave.
Tonn a mhanaich, monk's wave.
Torr abb, abbot's hill.
Torr, rocky pinnacle.
Tra ban, white shore.
Tra na siolaig, sand-eel shore.
Tra na criche, boundary shore.
Uamh mōr, big cave.
Uamh chrossain, cave of crosses.
Uamh na calman, cave of doves.
Uamh an t'seididh, cave of spouting.
Uiridh, dell.

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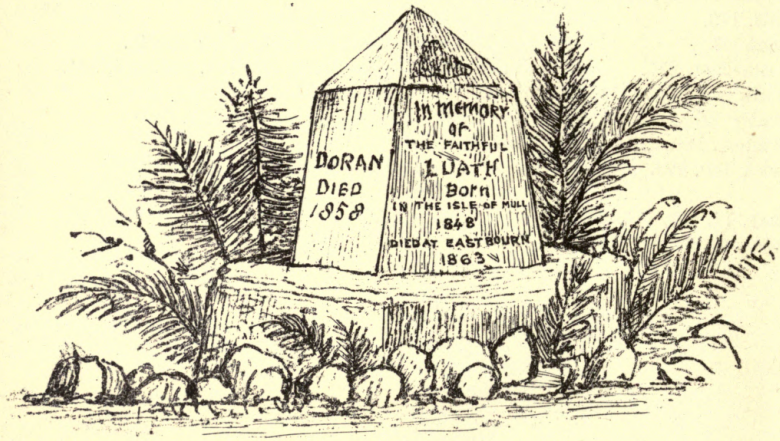
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